
Madan no Ou to Vanadis Volume 04 Preview

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These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 4

魔王の戦姫

ヴァナディース

4

川口士
Illustration よし☆ラ



「勝ち誇りたければ
勝つてみせろ」

＊「雷渦の閃姫」エリザヴェータ＊
「あまり抵抗すると、痛くなってしまうわよ、エレン？」

「おまえが僕を」 ＊「煌炎の蘭姫」サーシャ＊
「早々に見限ってくれれば……」

Temporary Farewell

A group of people intentionally traversed the Vosyes Mountains which ran along the border between Brune and Zhcted. Those who cross these mountains are few since there are few paths, all of which are poorly maintained.

However, the group rode on horseback, advancing silently along the narrow road.

They numbered approximately two thousand, marching beneath the cold winter weather which blew the Black ^{Zirnitra} Dragon Flag about – the flag belonging to the King of Zhcted. At the forefront of the group was a young girl.

She was 16 or 17 years old, a beautiful girl with silver-white hair down to her waist. Her eyes were reminiscent of a ruby. She was both lovely and valiant.

Her name was Eleanora Viltaria. She was one of only seven Vanadis which exist in the Zhcted Kingdom. Though those intimate with her called her by her nickname, Ellen, there were none amongst the troops she led who would.

A tense atmosphere drifted in the air. The silver-white haired Vanadis grasped the rein in her hands.

“--- Eleanora-sama.”

One Knight advanced from the soldiers following her, riding next to Ellen. She was Ellen's elder by two or three years. Her golden hair flowed from a tail on the left side of her head; her pupils were blue. Though she was a beauty, her expression showed no sign of affability.

Her name was Limlisha, and she was the second in command; she was Ellen's right arm.

“What is it, Lim?”

Seeing her trusted adjutant look at her from the side with a stern gaze, Ellen called out to her by her nickname . Lim nodded, her face still expressionless.

“Because of the wind, we should rest soon. The soldiers and the horses are quite tired.”

The wind strongly blew through the mountain path. It was cold and made travelers numb. The soldiers were

wrapped in blankets and wore fur beneath their armor to keep out the cold weather, but even then, the people who were sniffing and had red ears were not few in number.

Only Ellen wore clothing that did not protect against the cold weather. She wore her military outfit made of silk. Her stomach was bare and a longsword was held at her waist – it was a Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool granted to only the Vanadis, which helped protect her from the cold.

“We will take a rest in a half koku. We can get out of this pass before sunset, right?”

“It is possible.”

Without any time to think, Lim responded immediately with a short answer. Ellen smiled wryly and softened her expression. She had come to talk, despite having calculated that far.

“I understand. Dig a hole and start a fire. I'll allow some alcohol as well.”

If they did not do so quickly, any fire they attempted to start would disappear from the currently strengthening winds.

Lim returned to the soldiers. Ellen looked up at the sky with a dull expression. Rather than looking at the sun, she was looking at the gray clouds with a vague sense of anxiety.

--- Once we pass these mountains, we will be in Zhcted Kingdom... In my LeitMeritz.

However, that was not Ellen's destination. She was heading to the north of LeitMeritz to Legnica where her best friend, Alexandra – Sasha – governed.

Just a few days ago, Ellen was in the land of Territoire in Brune Kingdom. She was cooperating with Tigrevurmud Vorn – Tigre.

She separated from him and crossed the Vosyes Mountains because she was told Sasha was in a critical situation. When crisis fell before one of them, Ellen and Sasha always ran to each other. That was the pledge they had exchanged.

Until now, Ellen had only been thinking about Sasha; she had no room to think of anything else, but now that they were taking a break, she suddenly remembered Tigre. She turned her gaze to the west – toward Brune.

“... Tigre.”

She murmured his name unconsciously. Ellen shook her head when she realized what it was she said.

She reminded herself that he was fine.

One thousand men had been left with Tigre, and the famous Black Knight, Roland, announced his cooperation. Tigre's enemy, Duke Thenardier, could not immediately plan something. For now, she should help her best friend and return quickly.

--- Ellen did not know Roland was killed, nor did she know that the Muozinel Army had attacked Brune from their borders to the southeast.

It was impossible for her to know, especially since she was no longer in Brune. Ellen was an excellent governor, Commander, and warrior, but she was hardly omnipotent.

Ellen gradually looked down and prayed to Triglav, the God of War, for Tigre's safety. The faith in Brune and Zhcted were mostly the same.

Though it may have been more appropriate to pray to a more suitable God when asking for his safety, Ellen was most familiar with Triglav.

Her bright red pupils continued to look at the cloud covered sky, not a single ray of light reaching the earth.

That described the current situation of the country of Brune quite well.

The day Duke Felix Aaron Thenardier received a report regarding the Muozinel invasion was the same day he arrived home from the Royal Capital.

“... Something troublesome appeared.”

In his room surrounded by luxurious furniture, he clicked his tongue. The servant who brought the report reacted to it and went down on his knees at once. The

best way not to invite anger when the Lord's mood was poor was to remain out of sight and take a posture of obedience.

“Prepare a map.”

Thenardier gave an order, his face swelling with rage. At present, he was 42 years old. Despite that, he did not neglect his body and had a sturdy frame beneath his silk raiment. The anger emanating from his body would make a timid person weep.

After the servant left in a panic, Thenardier looked downward at the finely embroidered carpet covering the floor. He was quietly lost in thought; he had already regained his composure.

“Before it was Sachstein, now it's Muozinel...”

However, the scale was completely different.

While Sachstein dispatched three thousand troops and had them on standby, Muozinel had gathered troops in excess of twenty thousand.

It was an absurd miscalculation.

Thenardier had not originally intended to prolong the domestic dispute.

He wanted to quickly eliminate Duke Ganelon, his political rival. He wanted to receive an important position via his connection with the King's wife.

Afterward, he would have placed his son, Zaien, on the throne through an engagement with a woman of royal blood. The child between the two would have eventually become King.

--- That brat Tigrevurmud Vorn has ruined my plans.

Tigrevurmud Vorn had invited the Zhcted Army into the country and fought Zaien, killing him in battle. Both the assassins and the Vanadis Ludmira Thenardier sent were stopped by the Vanadis Eleanora.

In addition, the cornerstone of the defense along the western borders, Black Knight Roland, was gone. Though Roland disliked him, Thenardier knew his character well enough. So long as the King was present, the Strongest Knight would not be able to touch him.

For Thenardier, Roland was once a pawn which could not be replaced, since he had managed to maintain the stability of the western borders.

Thenardier stood with a lump in his throat. He did not notice how severe his countenance had become. The servant who returned with a map noticed his gaze and stood petrified.

“... What's the matter? Why are you just standing there?”

After Thenardier spoke in a low tone, the servant quickly ran to the ebony table in a panic and spread the map out. Thenardier paid him no concern and looked at the map with a cold gaze.

--- *What could their aim be?*

Muozinel Kingdom. It was a country difficult to maintain ties with.

There was no reason for them to send soldiers to other countries. Though five thousand troops crossed the southeast border from Muozinel years ago, it had long since passed.

“They must be in need of more slaves and came to get them.”

Naturally, Brune would prepare soldiers to intercept them. Though they had sent an emissary to protest, they received an arrogant response.

“We will enter your woods and get some fire wood. We're lacking materials to build a fire.”

Muozinel and Brune bordered one another. It was a natural course for them to have some association.

In the past, they had invaded both Zhcted and Brune, kidnapping people and looting their villages. They also had a fleet tailored to cross the sea so they could attack Sachstein and Asvarre.

Incidentally, none of the countries criticized their system of government. Every country, to some degree, had incorporated it into their policy. One example is selling off prisoners of war whose ransom was not paid in time as slaves.

Furthermore, they were a country that provided fine quality paper and goods like tea that many could not go

without. Even if it was an inconvenience, there was nothing to do but to associate with them.

If their aim was to obtain more slaves, they would ruin the region near the border.

But with a count of twenty thousand, their purpose could not simply be to obtain more slaves. It was likely they were aiming for territory or a fortress. They must have been preparing to march toward the King's Capital.

“Though it's annoying... maybe I should work with Duke Ganelon.”

As he muttered to himself, Thenardier began forming a strategy.

First, through Prime Minister Bodwin, he would have all Knights from the Royal Capital head to the southeast. He would then split up his own troops. One group would remain on standby in the capital while the other would head south.

“Muozinel has ships. They will likely attack from the sea to the south. It will be a one-sided battle if I don't make preparations.”

Most of the aristocrats ruling the lands to the south were allied with Thenardier. It was necessary he defend them as their leader.

The Muozinel Army was to the southeast. Thenardier was the kind of man who could make calm headed judgments in a moment.

“While protecting the Royal Capital, I will explore the enemy's movements. If they head to the south or east, I will attack them from behind or from their flank. If they head straight for the capital, I will wait it out. If they spread thin, I'll attack their supply line.”

What concerned him was the third force in the country

Tigrevurmud Vorn, his son's enemy, led an army made of Brune and Zhcted soldiers. Though the army was called the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army], Thenardier did not know that.

--- I have heard he has fewer than five thousand troops and his men are exhausted from their fight against Roland's

Knights of Navarre. I wonder if he'll be forced to fight the twenty thousand strong Muozinel Army if they head along Zhcted's border to the east.

"Given their position as a known traitor, they will not ask for help..."

If they did, they would be the vanguard of the attack against Muozinel. They could then be restrained and beheaded by Thenardier's hand. Thenardier had judged this to be the most prudent course of action.

"Fortunately, our soldiers can move immediately."

Before leaving the King's Capital, Thenardier gathered his soldiers from the neighboring territories. Though he originally planned to fight against Ganelon, contact was unavoidable.

Afterward, Thenardier sent a letter to Ganelon calling for military cooperation until the situation with Muozinel was taken care of.

"Now then... What will Ganelon do?"

A few days later, a force of nearly twenty thousand had gathered in Thenardier's territory.

The sky was blue and overcast; feeble rays of sunlight hit the ground. In the midst of winter, the men wore heavy fur coats. Their breaths fogged up as they exhaled. Thenardier divided his twenty thousand soldiers into two groups of ten thousand and headed south, leading seven thousand troops himself.

The remaining thirteen thousand troops were left in command of a man named Steid whom Thenardier trusted. He was a veteran with few losses who was well skilled in the military arts. His loyalty to Thenardier was high as well.

“Very well. Avoid unnecessary fights until we rejoin. It does not matter, even if Ganelon attacks. Retreat. Reduce damage as much as possible.”

“As you order, Lord Duke.”

Steid was a 33 year old man. He had short, fair hair and a downy beard covering his pale face. His height and build were average. His lack of expression hid any sign that he was leading a large army.

“It would be most ideal if we could take out Ganelon when his troops are tired from the battle with Muozinel, but I doubt things will be so convenient. Still, keep that in the corner of your mind.”

Thenardier did not believe the future would be so simple.

Making an appropriate decision according to the situation. He would only entrust Steid with more than ten thousand troops, so Thenardier entrusted command to him.

“Lord Duke. It is possible Ganelon has invited the Muozinel Army to invade the country. If that is the case, they will also know of what happened to Roland.”

Steid's doubt was denied with a shake of Thenardier's head. Showing a calm attitude here would help the soldiers settle down.

“That is not the case. If it were, the Muozinel Army would call out and join Duke Ganelon as quickly as possible. They would be obvious about it.”

If a noble as powerful as Ganelon joined with troops from another nation, the shock would be beyond just Tigrevurmud Vorn and the Zhcted Army.

It would paralyze the functions of the Royal Capital; all the aristocrats would become panic-stricken, and many would defect from Ganelon's lands and support Thenardier. There was no reason for Ganelon to ally with the Muozinel Army.

“Do not worry too much about any issues with Ganelon for now, but always take precautions.”

“Certainly. I will meet your expectations.”

Thenardier nodded to Steid who had kneeled on the spot.

Several days after he had left, Thenardier received a notice.

“... so Ganelon moved his troops.”

There was no response to the letter Thenardier had sent days before, but based on their movements, it seems Ganelon was unwilling to cooperate.

“Damned Ganelon. I've been looking for a chance to kill you since Roland died...”

An image of a map of Brune and the surrounding areas floated to Thenardier's mind.

---Was he waiting for either Sachstein or Muozinel to attack before he made his move?

Because Asvarre and Ganelon's territory to the northwest bordered one another, it was difficult, if not impossible, to establish a cease-fire.

If Sachstein or Muozinel dispatched their troops, it would be Thenardier who would move first to meet them, rather than Ganelon, simply based on the territories they governed.

“No matter. Our concern is Muozinel for now.”

Thenardier muttered to himself as a smile reminiscent of a ferocious carnivore floated to his mouth.

In Duke Thenardier's mansion, deep inside was an elderly man. His small body was wrapped in a black robe. He gazed at something without the need for light.

Meat from large beasts were torn off, the bones crushed. The area was covered in mud, the stench of decay was present.

However, the old man did not care about the smell permeating the room. Rather, he was looking at the small mountain inside the room.

It was the corpse of a ^{Vyfal}Wyvern, and it was known only to the old man. His name was Dreka^Vvac, and he had long served as Duke Thenardier's seer.

“Like I thought... It's different.”

Dreka^Vvac glared for a short time. He casually placed his hand on the lump of flesh and blood and gripped it.

“There is the power of the wind, but that's not all.”

An eerie smile covered his face, as his prediction had come true. Dreka^Vvac turned his gaze to the corner of the room where small golden eyes were.

“I need you to do some work, Vodyanoy.”

“--- Again?”

In the place the old man looked at, a question was uttered, the voice flickering in the darkness.

A young man with a bright smile sat on the floor with his back to the wall. He was of medium build and wore thick clothes with a fur collar and sleeves. His short black hair was loosely covered in a green cloth. He bit into a gold coin in his hand as if it were candy.

“It's not good for an old man to live in ease. You should run about on your own sometimes.”

“I must take care of the Dragons. Would you like to take my place?”

“Can't be helped. What do you need?”

The young man named Vodyanoy stood up as a gold coin was thrown in the air. It drew a beautiful arc and was calmly caught with the tip of his fingers.

“--- The user of the [Bow] has appeared.”

Drekavac's voice froze the air. Vodyanoy's smile disappeared and his eyes opened wide in surprise as he stared at the old man.

After a while, Vodyanoy's squint returned and his earlier smile was recovered.

“What do you want? Kill him?”

“He is not like the Vanadis who appear all the time. He is too precious to kill. Although I would like to capture him... Well, for the time being, you should know who I'm talking about.”

When the elderly man stopped speaking, Vodyanoy's body had already melted away. Soon, his entire body disappeared. Drekavac nodded in satisfaction.

“Now then, let's just watch. I wonder who will be the last to stand...”

As he muttered with a slightly happy tone, the old man turned his back to the Dragon's corpse and walked to the door.

The cold of winter deprived heat from the earth. A soldier woke up to the frigid weather and rubbed his hands together, moved his legs, wrapped his body in blankets, and shook as he watched his breath fog over.

If possible, he wanted to remain under the blanket, but that was unreasonable. After washing his face with cold water to wake up, he walked out of his tent to the fire.

Two people gathered and greeted each other as they warmed their hands over the fire. With the heat of a group, their bodies could finally move as usual at last.

“Please take my place a bit early.”

The soldier standing on guard spoke with a sleepy voice. This time, it would be his turn to take a rest. The man who held his hand up to the bonfire was reluctant to part, but he returned to his tent, donned his weapon and armor, and finally took the guard's place.

Territoire was in eastern Brune. Two thousand soldiers had built their camp at the westernmost end. Surrounded by a double fence, in the middle of the many tents, the Red ^{Bayard} Horse Flag, the flag of Brune, and the Black ^{Zirnitra} Dragon Flag, the flag of Zhcted, waved in the wind.

The ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] was made of both Brune and Zhcted soldiers.

It was led by a youth of 16 years, Tigrevurmud Vorn. Those close to him called him Tigre.

Though he was an earl who governed Alsace, one of the provinces in Brune Kingdom, his meeting with Ellen, a Vanadis of Zhcted Kingdom, greatly changed his life.

In order to defend Alsace where he was born and raised, and in order to defeat Duke Thenardier, who threatened the peace of his lands, Tigre began cooperating with Ellen. They had already experienced many battles together.

Zaien from Duke Thenardier's house, the man who attacked Alsace, was killed. To acquire Ellen's freedom of

movement, they fought against the Vanadis Ludmira. Tigre also managed to repel the Black Knight Roland, leader of the Navarre Knights, who had appeared to punish Tigre for his rebellion.

He had received cooperation from Roland and was within a few days distance from Nemetacum, the lands governed by Duke Thenardier.

However, news of Roland's death and the approach of a twenty thousand strong army from Muozinel was a great shock.

Tigre sat alone in the tent for the General, dozens of maps scattered about his surroundings.

His dull red hair was a mess in various places. Tigre groaned as he stared at the maps. He had not slept at all, so his complexion was poor and he was completely exhausted.

He continued to think. He thought about how he should move from then on, with the invasion of the Muozinel Army.

--- We have two thousand here. They have twenty thousand. We can't just fight them. At least if Ellen or Lim were here...

He sighed, having considered a pointless thing. Ellen and Lim were excellent Generals. Whether he fought or avoided fighting, they would have appropriate advice that Tigre had not thought of.

Still, he had reliable people he could count on.

His father's best friend, Massas Rodant, and Viscount Augre, who was currently cooperating with Tigre. Both were veterans rich with experience.

Still, Tigre did not dare to consult with them regarding this matter.

--- We could strengthen our defenses in Territoire and have the people take shelter to the north in Alsace and Aude. The question is whether or not to wait for help from the Knights or local aristocrats.

Above all, thinking of peace within his territories was his duty as their leader. Tigre needed to protect Alsace, Massas had to protect Aude to the north, and Augre must, first and foremost, protect Territoire.

--- That's why I can't ask them.

If he asked, Massas and the others would say to abandon the deserts to the southeast.

There was likely no one living in that region, and, in the first place, Tigre had no duty toward that land. So long as there were no instructions from the King, there was no reason for him to defend the mountains outside his territory.

However, Tigre knew the King would not issue a command, and it would leave a bitter taste in his mouth if he ignored a crisis before him.

Tigre turned his head to look at the sword laid on the ground. It was a large sword decorated brilliantly with gold along its guard.

Durandal. It was called the [Sword of Invincibility] in Brune, but it moved hands from Roland to Tigre. He received it from the Black Knight as proof that he recognized Tigre, but he did not imagine it would never return to its rightful owner.

Tigre recalled his conversation with Roland.

Roland asked what Tigre would do should Ellen's troops begin an invasion. Tigre replied he would fight to defend the people of Brune.

--- *Am I being conceited?*

Tigre was neither a hero nor a brave man. He was simply a noble governing a small territory in the frontier.

Although he was here to fight Duke Thenardier, such actions were once unthinkable.

“Is it a good time, Tigre-sama?”

The voice of a young girl he was accustomed to hearing called to him from outside the tent. Tigre looked curiously toward Teita, the maid who served him.

“Teita? At a time like this...”

He started saying that, but Tigre noticed morning had already dawned. He could hear noises outside his tent.

The lamp near his bedside was still lit, most of its oil used up. It seems he had been worried too much and was lost in thought.

“You may enter. What's wrong?”

As he called out gently, the winter sunlight shined through the curtain as a girl with twin tails in her chestnut hair quietly walked inside. She was dressed in black with long sleeves and a long skirt down to her feet. A white apron covered it. She carefully held an earthen pot.

“Good morning, Tigre-sama.”

Teita's chestnut hair shook as she bowed. Her bright smile clouded over the moment she saw Tigre's face.

“... Did you not rest last night?”

Though Tigre thought to make an excuse, it would only end badly. Teita, who he had grown up with, would see through him in an instant and he would lose.

“I was busy with a number of things. Well, that's just how it is.”

Teita glanced up at him reproachfully as she slowly approached Tigre with a container held with both hands.

Inside was a soup from which steam was rising. There were thin slices of meat, carrots, and cabbage floating about. The moment the fragrant aroma hit Tigre's nose, his belly rang out as if in waiting. He and Teita laughed.

“First, please warm your body. I will prepare other things immediately.”

“Thank you.”

Even if he was covered in blankets, he was still cold. Tigre received the bowl with a smile and brought it to his mouth to have a taste. He brought his spoon down to eat the vegetables. His empty stomach was now active and raised a cry of joy.

“Such poor manners, Tigre-sama.”

Though Teita's face was stern, she spoke with a kind tone like a mother dotingly scolding her child. Tigre, on the other hand, satisfied his body with the heat and saltiness of the soup as he finished it off with a sipping noise.

Seeing Tigre happily satisfy his appetite, Teita smiled and left the tent with peace of mind. She soon came back

with a basket and sat down next to Tigre, placing the basket gently on the ground.

There was bread and cheese in the basket and slices of smoked meat and potatoes. Teita poured wine into a bronze cup. By this time, Tigre had already emptied his bowl of soup.

He bit into the bread and cheese, ate the potato, and drank the wine in turns. Since it was still warm from the fire, both the taste and texture of the potato were pleasing.

When he finished at last, Tigre let out a satisfied breath

“Thank you for the meal. It was delicious.”

“Before that, please wipe your mouth.”

While her words were once again only words of blame, she smiled bitterly as she gently stretched her fingers forward, wiping the potato still around Tigre's mouth.

Teita stared at her finger for a troubled moment, thinking about whether or not she should lick it, but her face turned crimson and she hung her head down immediately.

“You also have some bad manners... No, never mind. Thanks for getting it for me.”

Though he had an idea as to why the chestnut-haired maid was embarrassed, Tigre thanked her like normal. Being near her gave him a sense of security he could only find in Alsace.

Teita nodded and quickly put everything into the basket.

“--- Teita.”

Tigre called to the girl who had her back turned to him. Teita had both a curious and awkward face as she looked back at Tigre. Her mind immediately became more serious and she sat upright as she noticed the intense atmosphere behind his words.

Tigre hesitated on how to begin the conversation. The two remained as they were for a short time.

“Teita, take separate action for the time being. Stay with Lord Massas.”

“... What do you mean?”

Though the words were within her expectations, Teita's voice still trembled.

“I, I came to take care of Tigre-sama, and yet...”

“It's dangerous. I can't afford it.”

“Still...”

Though she started to argue, when she saw Tigre's gaze, she shut her mouth. She looked down in silence. Tigre remained quiet, waiting for the maid's reaction.

Before long, Teita looked up.

“Will you return safely?”

“I promise.”

Tigre answered with a strong yet quiet voice. Teita looked up with a distorted smile as she was in tears. Tigre stood up and hugged Teita softly before speaking once again.

“I promise. I'll come back safely – at the latest, by spring.”

Teita let out a tearful sound. In response, Tigre lightly pat her back and answered her question once again.

When Teita left the tent, Tigre grabbed his bow.

When their breakfast meals had been finished, there were soldiers maintaining the fire, others servicing their armor, and some amusing themselves with gambling. Lightly saluting the men, Tigre headed toward Massas and Augre.

“You're awake, Lord Tigrevurmud.”

A young Knight ran up to him. Though he had valiant features, there was no hair on his head. Rather than being ashamed, he boasted of it.

“Good morning, Rurick. I am heading to see Lord Massas. Are you coming?”

The Knight – Rurick – nodded immediately.

“I will follow you. By the way, I just saw Teita crying a moment ago...”

Tigre had a bitter expression as he ruffled his hair violently. His heart was heavy.

“By the way, as a soldier of Zhcted... How would you fight against twenty thousand enemies?”

Rurick understood immediately hearing this question. His eyes shined, and a fearless smile floated to his face.

“You think there's a chance?”

“I don't know.”

“I can't possibly convince the soldiers if you don't even know that. At least start from there.”

Rurick shrugged his shoulder with a tepid face. Tigre's mouth also distorted as he responded.

“We have two thousand. They have twenty thousand. If I say there is a chance of victory, who would possibly believe me?”

“Though people believe things because they are believable, they also believe because they wish to believe in you.”

As they exchanged this conversation, they reached their destination. After checking with the guards, Tigre and Rurick entered.

The two people were immediately at a loss for words.

The two old men were sitting down with maps and papers scattered about. A bucket of water they used to keep themselves awake had been placed to the side.

“... Oh, Tigre.”

The old man, Massas, with his impressive gray hair and beard and stocky body, called out to them. His hair and beard were disheveled and deep, dark circles loomed beneath his eyes.

Behind him, a lanky old man – Augre – sat without showing any signs of concern with his loosely worn clothes.

The two were also racking their brains, and, like Tigre, had not gotten any rest upon hearing of the incoming crisis.

“I came here to talk... but will you two be fine?”

Tigre asked hesitantly. The two simply smiled in response.

They both thrust their head into the pail of water and let out a groan. The water was scattered as they shook their heads dry. They then wiped their faces with thick cloth before looking back at Tigre.

“Yes. Go on.”

Both Rurick and Tigre stepped back after seeing this, but they could not possibly leave without saying anything. Tigre sat before Massas, his stomach full of butterflies.

“I will take command – I will lead the soldiers southeast.”

Cutting to the core of the matter immediately, Tigre stared at Massas and Augre. The two aristocrats looked at each other; Massas clearly looked sullen.

“... I thought you would say that.”

Though his face and voice expressed amazement, he could not hide his affection.

“First, tell us your reasons.”

“To survive. I will defend what I must protect.”

“Then shouldn't we strengthen the defenses within Territoire?”

Augre looked at him with a grave expression. The smile of the good natured old man was in no way present.

Tigre had thought it would turn out this way. He had also given this much thought. Even if he wanted to defend people he had no relation to, though it may pass

as a beautiful thing, it was simply something beyond nonsense.

“If we are to strengthen our defenses... When twenty thousand troops approach, will we be able to hold out?”

“We can buy time. Knights and soldiers led by other nobles will appear. If we stop the Muozinel Army here, we will not have the strength to face Nemetacum.”

“There is a high possibility we will be defeated before reinforcements arrive.”

Tigre had thought of the most frightening situation because there was no way to eliminate its probability of occurring.

“There is also the possibility we will not receive reinforcements.”

Tigre turned to Massas with a look of surprise. This is exactly what Tigre feared. Augre, as well, laughed sarcastically as he played with something in his hand.

“Thanks to Thenardier, we are considered rebels. If we ask for help, he could easily criticize us. If we fight alone, we would help him exhaust the Muozinel Army.”

“So you thought that far.”

He could only be grateful that the two had already thought that far.

“It's important to think, but what matters most are the judgment and actions you take afterward.”

Massas put his hand on Tigre's shoulder.

“You've thought a lot about this, and you clearly wish to defend the people, but...”

Can you do it? Before he said those words, Tigre smiled and nodded powerfully.

“There is something I need to ask of you two.”

Tigre had the soldiers of Brune gather that afternoon.

Beneath the overcast sky, the sun shined with feeble rays of light. Tigre, with Massas and Augre to his right and left, told the soldiers that the Muozinel Army had broken through the southeastern border.

While a wave of shock and agitation spread amongst them, Tigre continued to speak calmly, hiding the tension in his mind.

“The enemy numbers twenty thousand while we have two thousand. Although they are within Brune, they are still a long distance away. You may think this unrelated to you, however... If we leave things as they are, the enemy will come soon; they will attack the villages and towns where you live.”

The atmosphere had become serious. Small noises could be heard here and there. Many feelings, including fear, danced about the grounds.

“I have a plan for victory. However, it will not work if you are frightened. If you do not fight with your full might, I can't utilize your strength.”

There was no plan; however, Tigre, despite the guilt he felt in his stomach, lied to give the soldiers hope. If they sunk into despair before the battle, they would lose before they could even fight.

Finally, Tigre threw unexpected words in order to reassure them.

“The Zhcted Army has said they will fight to the last man – So what will you do?”

The question brought about an instantaneous change. The smoldering will in the Brune soldiers was light anew, their fear blown away by their sense of rivalry.

If it is to protect his home, a soldier would show a will to fight like a wild animal. One raised a cry, spreading the feeling to the other troops. Tigre, Massas, and Augre, all clenched their fists unconsciously.

--- This response is better than I expected...

Tigre watched the soldiers of Brune in admiration.

Though the soldiers of Brune and Zhcted which composed the [Silver Meteor Army]^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} were on friendly terms, the conflict between them was deeply rooted. Though it had been a problem for Tigre, this rivalry burned brightly and wiped away their fear.

Incidentally, Rurick had confirmed with the Zhcted soldiers before the speech was made. The bald headed Knight sent a response while patting his round head.

“Though I can't guarantee you an answer ahead of time, it should be fine.”

The one who carefully chose one thousand troops from the Zhcted Army to follow Tigre was Ellen.

They possessed a good will toward Tigre in their own way, and they were willing to remain when Ellen departed. He would not likely have much trouble convincing them.

When the charged noise settled down, Tigre declared with a loud voice.

“Everyone, please act immediately as you are ordered!”

After that, every soldier was busy making preparations to move. The soldiers received food and fuel for several days, and a cart was procured to carry provisions for many people. Every person brought their provisions to a large tent.

By the time the soldiers of the [Silver Meteor Army] finished preparations, the sky was dyed vermillion as the sun set in the western sky.

Tigre, Massas, and Augre united on their horses.

Massas and Augre wore thick winter coats on top of their armor. Tigre wore a leather vest and carried a quiver at his waist, and his family heirloom, the black bow, was attached to the saddle.

Though fatigue dyed their faces, their desire to fight surpassed it.

Approximately seventeen hundred troops were lined up behind Tigre. The ratio of cavalry to infantry in the [Silver Meteor Army] was about eight to two.

Though Tigre did not want to bring so many cavalry, if he had not hardened his defenses, he would only lose more troops. It was impossible for him to make this group consist only of soldiers from Alsace. In the end, Tigre avoided bringing soldiers from another territory.

Also, Tigre wanted to keep people he could absolutely trust beside him.

Massas and Augre followed closely behind with a few dozen and one hundred troops respectively. The remaining were injured and remained behind under the care of Batran and Teita.

Batran wanted to follow as well, but Tigre felt uneasy, feeling his physical strength might abandon him during battle due to his age.

“Lord, I am sorry. If only I had the stamina from when I was young...”

Tigre smiled and shook his head seeing the old man and maid who served him droop their heads.

“Look after Teita for me, Batran. I can relax if I know you're defending her.”

The old man regained his enthusiasm and said to leave things to him.

“You, too, Teita. I know you'll be busy, but don't overwork yourself.”

“I should say the same to you, Tigre-sama. Please... Return in safety.”

Though Teita retorted strongly, tears immediately appeared in her eyes.

“Now then, you two should get some rest.”

Massas spoke while stroking his gray beard, seeing Tigre's bow.

“Leave it to us. Stay firm, Tigre.”

“I'll say the same to you. Don't overexert yourself.”

While Augre encouraged him, Tigre bowed in gratitude once again.

While Tigre headed to the southeast to face the Muozinel Army, Massas and Augre would gather the Knights in the surroundings.

“Though it's unlikely we can stand up to an army of twenty thousand with only two thousand, I should be able to hold them up for a short amount of time. Sir Massas, Viscount Augre. Please, do what you can to make the Knights and aristocrats move.”

Tigre, as a 16 year old, would not be able to move others. This was especially true as someone who was thought to lead an insurrection. However, Massas and Augre who had vast amounts of experience might be able to persuade them.

There were many reasons to face the Muozinel Army.

Though the largest reason to move was to protect the citizens, the Knights and aristocrats would not be persuaded to move so easily unless someone took the lead. Also, the Muozinel Army was currently on the border and had not yet chosen a direction to attack in.

--- I learned this from Lim before.

“Lord Tigrevurmud, do you understand? To eliminate your opponent's options, you must dull their judgment. If you can successfully do this, you will carry an advantage into battle.”

He recalled Lim's antisocial face and voice during their conversation in autumn.

“But if you eliminate their options, doesn't that make it easy for them to take action?”

“Assume you force your opponent into a situation where they can take only three actions. It makes countermeasures simple. Furthermore, the enemy will be confused. In this state, he will most likely act in a way he should not. Your chances of success will only improve there.”

“I see.”

Tigre obediently expressed his admiration of Lim, who momentarily was drawn out of her expressionless appearance. Though her speech continued on in a severe manner, a gentle smile appeared momentarily.

“Though what I have told you is basic, don't forget it.”

Tigre did not remember learning much regarding strategy from his father, Urz.

There was still much for Tigre to learn that his father likely wanted to teach him; however, when Tigre was 14, he took over as head of the Vorn family when his father fell ill.

--- I'll hold the Muozinel Army off near the border.

After seeing Massas and Augre off, Tigre was followed by two people on horseback with looks of determination in their eyes.

One person was the bald Knight, Rurick, who took lead of the one thousand Zhcted soldiers.

The other person was in his mid-twenties. He was a young man with brown hair and bronze pupils. He was Viscount Augre's son, Gerard. He commanded the seven hundred Brune soldiers.

“I entrust my son in your hands. Use him as you see fit.”

Augre said those words as he introduced Gerard as he spoke to Tigre with a smile. Rurick, on the other hand, was not happy about it. After the parent and child separated, there was a clear sign of dissatisfaction in his face.

“If I recall, he was the impolite person who ignored Lord Tigrevurmud and simply praised our Vanadis-sama after the battle with Marquis Greast.”

“... Who did you hear that story from?”

Though Tigre asked that with a troubled face, there were only two possible candidates. When Gerard praised Ellen, only Lim and Tigre were present.

“Limlisha. Upon her departure, she said to take care about this man.”

“Well, he's the type Lim would hate... but Viscount Augre would not simply leave his soldiers in the hands of his son without reason. Though I can't say our relationship is great, I doubt it will be a problem.”

Tigre did not want to speak poorly of Augre's son, so he purposely said vague words.

Remembering the conversation at the time, Tigre looked over Rurick's shoulder. Sure enough, Gerard glared at him with dangerous eyes.

Though Tigre was also anxious, it was too late to say anything now, and he was lacking in time and people as it was.

Though their aim was to move quickly, the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] dispatched troops to the surrounding villages and towns and reported to them that Muozinel would soon attack and to take shelter in Territoire.

In doing so, they would be able to gather maps of the area, purchase food and supplies they had not brought, and gain places to rest.

After several days, Tigre was in south Brune gazing over the Agnes province.

Two Thousand and Twenty Thousand

More than half the province of Agnes was a barren wasteland lacking water. Most plants could not grow there, and the sand only made the atmosphere arid.

There were many cliffs and hills of sandstone which were reminiscent of collapsed towers. A desolate wind blew through the valleys between cliffs.

Despite that, a fortress was erected in the area since it was bordered by Zhcted and Muozinel. Small villages and towns, though few, were scattered in the vicinity of the castle out of fear of attack.

The Muozinel Army appeared in the area approximately ten days ago.

They rushed the border fortress and took it by storm. Though the three thousand Knights in the fortress offered some resistance, it was all in vain. Almost all were cut down and abandoned. Those able to escape the battle and leave the fortress numbered fewer than one hundred.

Afterward, the Muozinel Army attacked the villages around the castle, one after another.

The Muozinel Army's calm, systematic attack was frightening.

For example, they did not simply set a fire and leave it be.

They used their numbers to attack in waves. They demolished any fences or walls, forced their way inside, and captured the residents one after another. They plundered all money and goods.

Unless a person they had captured was an aristocrat or someone with political power, they took their belongings and kept them as slaves. All the elderly and children, who had no utility as a slave, were killed without mercy.

Finally, they deprived the villages of all food and destroyed the houses. The slaves were made to carry items out of the wreckage to be used as firewood before leaving the villages behind.

Any stone houses were used to store the corpses of the elderly, children, and any who resisted.

The number of villages they attacked numbered more than twenty. They were attacked, destroyed, and deprived of all things.

The flag of Muozinel is the color of the earth. On it is a sword and a golden helmet which draws a sharp angle. It is said the helmet and sword are symbols of Vahram, their God of War.

The flag was larger than those of the neighboring countries, and it was supported by a thick iron pole painted with gold leaf. Enemies could see it from afar, and when they were standing near to it, it meant they were being forced back.

Against the gray of winter, the Muozinel Army covered their flag with gravel to keep it from standing out.

The soldiers with brown skin wore leather armor on top of their thick clothes. Their curved swords were held at their waist, and they carried a shield and a spear more than twice their height in their hands.

The soldiers had black cloth wrapped around their head, and the majority had iron helmets on top of that. The force was primarily composed of infantry. The cavalry did not make even 20% of the entire army.

Behind the twenty thousand soldiers, more than one thousand people followed with their hands bound with rope.

They were only young men and women covered in scars and bruises, their clothes in tatters. Despite an improper appearance, it was not uncommon for the women's clothes to have been torn away.

They were seized by the Muozinel Army and forced into slavery. They shouldered small bundles. Despair was found in their faces, and their gait was weak.

“So that's the Muozinel Army...”

Tigre and a few soldiers from Zhcted had hidden themselves amongst the sandstone cliffs and were observing from a distance.

Though Tigre was the General and was in no position to move about thoughtlessly, he pressed Rurick and

Gerard and joined the reconnaissance unit. He wore leather armor over hempen clothes. In his hand was the usual black bow, and his quiver was at his waist.

“Their skin color really is different.”

“A simple comment. That really is like you, Tigre-san.”

Teasing him while wearing similar garb was Aram. His round face and body and brown, bristly hair were reminiscent of a beaver. When Tigre was a prisoner of war, he had shared a friendly relation with this military scout from Zhcted.

“Can't be helped. It's my first time seeing anyone from Muozinel.”

“You didn't see any in Alsace? I've heard there are many Muozinel merchants.”

“... Even if they came, it would not be for trade.”

While he feigned ignorance, Tigre had not lost his seriousness. His dark eyes were turned behind the Muozinel Army – toward the slaves.

--- It would be pointless to push them back. If I can, I want to free those people.

“Will you aim from here? With your skill, would you be able to hit them?”

Though Aram encouraged him with a joke, Tigre shook his head.

“It's impossible. The wind is too strong here.”

The wind blowing down from the cliffs was far too strong and erratic. Even for Tigre, it was difficult to read the flow of wind of a land he had just stepped on to.

--- Should I use that power...?

He looked down to the black bow in his hand. It was a bow with a mysterious power which had allowed him to shoot high in the air, pierce through a thick castle gate, and push back Roland.

If he attacked directly, the soldiers around him would be wounded, and he would only harm a few dozen from the Muozinel Army at the most.

Tigre shook his head. There were too many unknowns with the bow. He also did not like the fact that it may have a relation with Tir na Fa, the Goddess who reigned over death, darkness, and the night. He could hardly find her favorable, since she had once taken Teita hostage.

Above all, he had always used the power of the bow when he was near Ellen. In his battle with Roland, he was also alongside the Vanadis Sophia Obertas. There was only one time where he used the power of the bow on its own, and that was in the shrine of the Goddess. He had no confidence he could handle it alone.

--- I almost went unconscious when I used it against Roland

.

If the [^{Unstoppable Silver Flow}Silver Meteor Army] was thrown into confusion, it was unlikely they could rout the enemy.

--- If I shoot their Commander here, it would only cause a temporary confusion at the most.

There was also the possibility they would turn their anger on the slaves. He wanted to avoid that.

“Let's turn back. Rurick should have begun preparations. Even if we can't do anything today, I'd like to begin attacking tomorrow.”

In accordance with Tigre's words, the Zhcted soldiers carefully walked away from the cliff so as not to make a sound. The last to reach the ground was Tigre. Since he had done so in a quick manner with his delicate frame, Aram smiled in admiration.

“Really, were your parents wild animals or something?”

“If that's the case, yours must have been beavers.”

Tigre returned a joke immediately. A small laugh was heard from the soldiers.

“You should see his parents at least once, Tigre-san. They've definitely transformed into beavers.”

“I didn't think anyone could take after their parents so much.”

Tigre and the others returned to their horses, having checked the Muozinel Army was not in the area, and chatted pleasantly while whispering.

Gripping the horse's bridle, Tigre motioned for them to not raise a sound.

--- I heard something... Footsteps?

They were currently on an animal trail in the mountains. There were many rocks strewn about, so the ground was not even, and with the pillars of stone and crevices formed between rocks, visibility was poor.

Tigre stroked the back of his horse's neck to calm it down and focused on his ears.

--- I'm not wrong, those are footsteps.

Scouts from the Muozinel Army may have been searching the surroundings. Tigre motioned to Aram and the others; the two walked around on foot, leaving the others behind.

Nocking an arrow to his bow, Tigre approached a cliff-side near the sound and hid himself quietly.

The person appeared to be a traveler who was being chased. Four people from the Muozinel Army were chasing after the traveler with their curved swords held high. They called out something in the language of Muozinel. Though Tigre did not understand the meaning, it was clear what they were talking about based on their facial expression.

The traveler tripped and was quickly surrounded by the soldiers.

Immediately afterward, one of the Muozinel troops was pierced through the head.

The arrow, was of course fired by Tigre.

The Muozinel soldiers were at a loss for words. Tigre had shot an arrow to stop them without giving any thought. They were sure to slaughter the person if he had left them alone. Still, he was anxious that the traveler may be injured by his arrows, so he took precaution of the surroundings as he shot.

The Muozinel soldiers fell to the ground and stopped moving. After checking the surroundings to ensure no other soldiers were present, the two descended from the cliff and walked to the traveler on the ground.

“Are you okay?”



Upon approach, Tigre noticed the traveler was a girl. She wore a thick mantle which stuck tightly to her breasts, but from the clifftop, he could not tell.

Though the girl stared at the corpses in a daze, her azure eyes were dyed with vigilance and her body went rigid when she noticed Tigre walking toward her. Tigre showed his hands to her and smiled to help her relax.

“I am not your enemy. I am Tigrevurmud Vorn from Brune.”

Hearing Tigre's words, the girl blinked several times. The wind blew and shifted her hood slightly. Her face seemed gaunt, and her golden hair was covered with dust, but she still remained beautiful. From what Tigre could see, she was his age, or perhaps a year younger.

However, Tigre tilted his neck, as he felt he had seen her beauty before.

--- I've seen her somewhere... Where was it? It feels pretty recent.

“Are you alone? Or is there someone else...”

The girl shook her head feebly.

“Can you stand?”

Tigre offered his hand. The girl tried to grab it, but staggered forward. Tigre quickly kneeled and supported her body.

The girl seemed to have fainted. Tigre brought his ear to her mouth to confirm she was breathing, then he touched her neck to monitor her pulse. She seemed to be feverish.

--- Her life doesn't seem to be in danger. Fatigue, maybe...

Tigre looked at the girl with a troubled face. Though he did not want to abandon her, he was worried about extra personnel before his battle with Muozinel.

“She's such a lovely girl. I'm sure she'd be even cuter if all that dust was removed.”

The men came down the cliff and spoke candidly having seen the girl's face. The others nodded in agreement.

“It seems she ran away. What will you do?”

“We don't have much choice but to take her back.”

Tigre lifted her in his arms as he gave an answer. She was lighter than he expected, even with her delicate body . With the help of the soldiers, she was tied to his back. When it was done, he looked at the four corpses lying on the ground.

“Check to see if they have anything important on them . Take their armor.”

Though he was reluctant to do so, he had no room to make any errors. Though Tigre also searched the soldiers ' belongings, nothing was found.

The corpses were hidden amongst the rocks so they would not be easy to find; then Tigre and the others returned to the main unit.

“Looks like you found something pretty big.”

Those shocked words were the first thing Rurick said to Tigre.

Two thousand slaves followed the twenty thousand Muozinel troops as they passed through the wilderness of Agnes.

Their marching speed was slow. They were composed primarily of infantry, and since they were in enemy territory, they advanced while deliberately scouting the surroundings for small villages.

Still, they were not encountering any obstacles, so the march was extremely favorable.

“Really... There's nothing around here.”

Kashim, leader of the Muozinel troops, looked about on horseback while basking in the dry wind mixed with sand.

“Though our task is to move forward and thoroughly crush any town and village we find... At this rate, we may have nothing by the time we reach our destination.”

Their purpose was to take territory from Brune. Though Muozinel had aimed at the port towns which were rich and had vast lands with numerous crops from the southern seas, a golden opportunity had finally come to them.

Their underlying motive was to plunder the lands while Brune was struggling with their own confusion.

Kashim turned 30 this year. His skin was the same brown color peculiar to those of Muozinel. At a glance, he was sharp as a blade and was an impressive man. It was shown by not a helmet but a white cloth wrapped about his head, which was decorated with silver and jewels.

He was once a slave. Because his talent was recognized, he was freed. He achieved the position of General after many feats of valor on the battlefield.

--- I was once a slave, but now I am a General. I will continue to bring success to this expedition, but if I lose...

Kashim shook the dark thoughts away in a hurry. While he ambitiously aimed at a higher position, he was fearful of returning to slavery. It was a common occurrence.

Looking over his shoulder, he saw a group of Brune citizens tethered together with ropes, freezing in the winter wind. There were some who resisted, but they were captured, and now, most were obedient.

--- I do not wish to be like that again.

With those thoughts in his head, he looked up to the sky. Though there was time until sunset, it would become increasingly difficult to hide in the reddish-brown of the cliff-side as they approached the ultramarine of the wilderness ahead. The wind blew coldly against them.

--- It's about time to settle for the night.

While lost in thought, a report arrived from a unit which had advanced further ahead.

“General, the enemy has appeared. I believe it is the Brune Army.”

Kashim frowned after hearing the word enemy. While he was backed by an army of twenty thousand, he was not entirely sure of the situation before him.

“Their number?”

“About one to two hundred. They are almost all cavalry. We can attack with catapults and archers, but they can defend with their shields. Still, they will have injuries...”

The soldier's report showed no signs of concern. It seems he was appealing, as if they were just troublesome flies moving about.

“With that number, we can shoot some arrows to drive them away and have them scatter.”

“That may be so... but they will return shortly after. We'll only be in the same situation.”

Kashim understood. Though he thought it would be easy to get rid of them, he was annoyed by the promptness of the report. He continued to dwell on it.

--- They don't seem like the remnants from the castle. Also, against our numbers, they would not have prepared only one or two hundred men. They're probably drawing us in.

Should they go chase, only more enemies awaited them.

“Take three thousand infantry and find every last one of them.”

“Isn't three thousand a bit exaggerated? We should be fine with five hundred.”

“Our role is to thoroughly crush all who get in our way. Go quickly, I will not say it twice.”

Kashim clicked his tongue toward the subordinate who looked at him curiously.

--- If there is a large force close by, our reconnaissance should have found some traces. Since they didn't, with a decoy of one or two hundred, they should number two thousand at most.

One thousand archers and two thousand spear bearers , three thousand troops in all, began to move.

Soon after, they entered a bottleneck surrounded by cliffs. The Brune soldiers hid amongst the crevasses in the cliff-side to keep from view of the three thousand Muozinel troops.

Once the Muozinel troops exited the valley, they entered an open area with sand surrounding them. Though enclosed in a blind alley, they had no time to spread out.

It was an amazing sight. They were surrounded by a black shadow with many flags waving above them.

“Five thousand... No, Six thousand.”

A soldier forced his voice down. No matter how he looked, they were outnumbered.

The Muozinel Army knew they had fallen into a trap. Though they understood, they had no time to react.

Against the western sky dyed vermillion, a battle cry was raised from all three sides. The roar of hooves and the tremors followed the large black shadow as it descended upon them. The two hundred troops the Muozinel Army had chased after had also turned around

.

The Commander of the Muozinel Army loudly ordered a retreat, but it was not smoothly transmitted. The majority of his troops were caught in the valley and

could not see what the soldiers at the vanguard witnessed.

The soldiers advancing and the soldiers retreating collided with one another. In the darkness of the surrounding valley, they only grew more confused. The Muozinel troops had stopped moving and were shot at with stones and arrows without mercy.

The stones thrown were about the size of a fist which broke many bones and caused an intense pain when hitting the face or hand. In addition, the unit Commanders who desperately ordered commands with hoarse voices were shot down one after another.

The Muozinel Army had lost the will to fight and sunk further into anarchy. They abandoned each other and trampled over others in order to escape.

Very little time had passed since the start of the advance to the retreat through the bottleneck.

In less than a half koku, more than one thousand soldiers were lost.

“Our first battle went well, somehow...”

While looking at the fallen Muozinel soldiers piled up in the bottleneck, Tigre muttered words full of fatigue.

As he turned around, he looked at the black shadow cast by the flags waving in the wind.

It was camouflage. He had used the same trick against Zaien back in Alsace. Many carts loaded with materials and tents were used to cast a large black shadow. They had been deliberately adjusted so the shadow could be seen from the Muozinel Army based on the time.

“They may come back. Finish the work quickly and pull out.”

Rurick gave orders to the soldiers as he continued removing the armor from the dead Muozinel troops. The stones and arrows were also collected.

After they finished cleaning up, the
Unstoppable Silver Flow
[Silver Meteor Army] disappeared on the other side of the hill under the cover of darkness.

Though he had told Massas he wanted to fight, Tigre was mindful enough not to fight an enemy numbering twenty thousand from the front.

The plan he devised this time was to reduce their power and dull their movements.

When he returned to the base away from the path where the Muozinel troops were, Tigre ordered the soldiers to erect their tents and rest. By the time they finished, the sun had completely sunk.

Rurick and Tigre entered the General's tent where Gerard was. The three sat at a table surrounded by many maps.

“For the time being, congratulations on your victory.”

“Though it really is only for now.”

Gerard immediately interrupted Rurick's words. Though Rurick clearly had a sullen expression, he maintained his prudence in deference to Tigre. After a quick nod, Tigre asked Gerard a question.

“How many were killed, and how many are injured?”

“We have no casualties this time, but we have twenty seven injured. Amongst them, there are three that cannot fight. The rest have mild injuries.”

Hearing Gerard's report, Rurick and Tigre heaved a sigh of relief.

“What of the arrows and stones?”

“We have retrieved approximately fifty-six arrows in total and eleven stones per cavalryman. We have distributed five to each of our infantrymen.”

Without looking at anything, Gerard answered without pause. He also described the distribution of food and fuel, as well as armor.

“Approximately 10% can be reused. Assuming our consumption remains as it is, we will last for another two campaigns. I doubt we will last in a large scale battle. Also, though Zhcted troops are experienced with the bow, there are few archers amongst those from Brune.”

With the young, brown-haired man's speed and accuracy in calculation, both Tigre and Rurick let out a moan.

Though Tigre and Rurick also had such an ability, Gerard was faster. Either way, he had taken charge of

logistics, which was a welcome surprise to Tigre, since he could now focus on thinking of plans and commanding the soldiers.

--- We need to find a way to replenish our supplies.

Tigre was keenly aware of his situation. Back when he was in Territoire, Ellen was with him, so he did not have to worry much about funds, and it was easy to buy food and fuel from the towns and villages in the vicinity. He was also able to arrange for materials to repair armor and horseshoes.

It was different now, though. Even a single arrow could not be wasted. He had also given the soldiers stones to supplement their lack of arrows.

--- First, we'll need to find more stones. There will likely be some on the side of the road...

“What will we do next?”

Rurick asked as he folded his arms, but the answer was not returned immediately. Tigre stared hard at the map. As they traveled through Agnes, they had negotiated with every town and village for information which was further supplemented by reconnaissance.

He would not have been able to set a trap or would have been drawn into a larger battle if he did not have this information.

“Have they slowed down their advance?”

Gerard carefully shook his head in response to Tigre's question.

“Considering what we have heard from the scouts' reports, their speed has not fallen.”

He became anxious. Though they had a little damage, two hundred troops were able to hold off a large army. Next, Tigre asked Rurick what he thought of the enemy General.

“He is excellent.”

After giving a succinct answer, Rurick supplemented him with an explanation.

“He sent three thousand troops to deal with two hundred, so he has a rough idea of how many troops we

really have. He came with the intent to crush us. Their marching speed not dropping is proof of their recovery, but---"

Rurick's words stopped as he tilted his head.

"He seems a bit too serious, or perhaps he is nervous. According to our scouts, he crushed small villages without overlooking a single one. His reaction was unusually prompt today as well."

"That's right. I also felt that way."

Tigre felt he may be able to exploit that trait.

If he could not stop their movements, it was necessary to change his goal. He would have to think about how to break the large force with his small army.

"If possible... I wish to perform two more campaigns before we leave Agnes."

Today's battle only had the purpose of dulling their opponent's movements. They also applied mental pressure. Even at the risk of life, he wanted to launch another attack.

“Earl Vorn, what do you think is the largest difference between us and our enemies?”

Hearing Tigre mutter seriously, Gerard turned with a bitter expression of doubt toward Tigre. Though curious about his attitude, Tigre responded frankly.

“Though there are many differences... I believe you refer to the difference in our military power?”

“That is correct... What I wish to say is, while the enemy can lose many battles, we cannot. We cannot lose even a few dozen troops.”

Gerard's cold words made the atmosphere tense.

“It is said that all defeats are significant if it results in victory, but that is an expression for those who have the means. If we increase the number of battles, our [Possibility of Defeat] will increase.”

“All we need for victory is to win.”

Rurick spoke with a tone that clearly showed disappointment. Tigre wished to soften the tense atmosphere and spoke.

“Gerard. Do you know the fairytale of the rabbit and the bear? It is a story in which a small rabbit defeats a powerful bear using wisdom and agility.”

It was a story he had not yet told to Lim. Tigre continued talking, thinking that in the corner of his mind.

“I'll simplify the story. The rabbit fended off the Bear's attacks blow for blow, eventually tiring it out. Eventually, it could not move and was forced to give up.”

“I also know of the story.”

Gerard smiled at him as if he were an idiot and continued to speak.

“There are two endings to that. It is said the bear teased the rabbit repeatedly. The rabbit got carried away and was finally caught by a blow which took its life immediately – in other words, it only needed to be stopped once.”

Gerard spread his arms and made a sour face before continuing his words.

“Even if you bet on this plan to achieve victory, if you are unlucky, you lose. The moment you choose to fight,

you open the possibility of defeat. In the first place, and I believe I said this a moment ago, we do not have the strength to fight. Even if we leave Agnes, we will only find uninhibited towns and villages. After all, we made them leave their homes.”

Rurick reacted more sensitively than Tigre to Gerard's words. After hitting his head a few times with the palm of his hand, he frowned at Gerard.

“You're quite glib. How about offering an opinion rather than a complaint?”

“Given our current state, that is my opinion, bald man of Zhcted.”

“... Refrain from excessive language, Gerard, otherwise you will become the bald man of Brune.”

Tigre scolded Gerard's manner of speaking as he vomited abusive language. Though he had ranted many times since they left Territoire, Tigre found it difficult to believe he was the son of the gentle Augre.

Though Gerard bowed and apologized, his attitude hardly matched his action.

--- I hope we don't have another problem appearing...

Gerard brought the soldiers of Brune together, but there were many troops from Alsace and Aude that Massas had brought. The troops under Augre's control was actually a mixture of people. Their equipment was also scattered.

Gerard had done a good job keeping them from colliding.

It seems he kept his sarcasm for Tigre and Rurick.

When Gerard looked up, they continued their conversation as if nothing had happened.

"The problem is not just our ability to fight. If they use the slaves as a shield, our army will fall apart immediately."

The Brune soldiers would not be able to desert their people, and if the Zhcted soldiers attacked without hesitation, the [Silver Meteor Army] would fall apart.

Unstoppable Silver Flow

"... I got it."

While staring intensely at the map, Tigre returned his answer with a heavy tone.

Though he wanted to help them as quickly as he could, if the [Silver Meteor Army]^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} fought head on, they would be swallowed in an instant. Even if it was a heroic action, they would not be able to take any further action.

“By the way.”

Probably as a change of pace, Rurick changed the topic as if he had just recalled something.

“Lord Tigrevurmud. How is that child?”

Thinking of the girl he had saved from the Muozinel soldiers, Tigre shook his head.

“She's quite weak. Though there's nothing wrong with her life, she is currently sleeping. She wakes up, eats some soup, and then returns to sleep. It's happened a few times.”

Tigre entrusted her to others since he was busy and had no time to spare a thought.

Though he had seen her a few times when he was free, she was asleep and in no state to talk. He did not have the mindset to force her to talk, either.

“We've been thinking too much about the Muozinel Army. For now, let's take a rest.”

Amongst the Muozinel Army.

Kashim was furious seeing soldiers, covered in blood and dust, with their shoulders drooped. No matter how firmly he clenched his fists, however, he did not release his anger on others. He was barely able to restrain himself.

The number of enemies was five to six thousand. Though he doubted the report when he heard it, he could say nothing upon learning of the details. Though he did

not know of the name of the [Silver Meteor Army], he almost precisely understood the camouflage they had used.

“They did it, the Brune Army...”

The weather and geographical features were skillfully used. Though more than one thousand troops had died, it did not account for even 10% of his men. There was still room to relax.

Soon after, Kashim received a report from a scouting unit that there were new traces of a camp being made the night before.

“The enemy should number a little less than two thousand. They seem to be changing base every day or two.”

“Well done.”

Kashim showed his appreciation for the reconnaissance and handed a bag of gold coins as a reward.

At times like these, he was not stingy. This was one of the reasons he made it to his position as General from a slave.

While waiting for dawn, Kashim reorganized his army . Until then, the cavalry from the three thousand troops had been distributed to the right and left and advanced ahead of the main force. In the surroundings, there were irregular outcrops of stones, which would make it difficult to take advantage of a cavalryman's mobility.

He changed the distribution of troops so the infantry were placed to the right and left, telling them to be particularly wary of their flank.

The enemy's power did not even amount to two thousand troops. He told his troops not to be misled, since they would disguise themselves to appear to have a superiority in numbers.

--- We have an army ten times larger than they have. Even without tricks, we will win.

At that time, Kashim had not noticed he had already mostly fallen into the enemy's trap.

It was during the evening of the day when the
^{Unstoppable Silver Flow}
[Silver Meteor Army] made their surprise attack.

As the cliffs towering to the left and right of the pass disappeared, the road broadened. Behind the rocks, a group of cavalrymen approached under cover of darkness and hid diagonally behind the Muozinel Army. They numbered approximately five hundred.

“An ambush.”

Kashim calmly handed out orders. The Muozinel infantry lined themselves up along the side without showing a gap and shot their arrows toward the mountains behind them.

The ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow}
[Silver Meteor Army] blocked the arrows with shields and threw stones at the Muozinel troops in return. The horses ran about in place, causing their troops to collapse.

However, the fierce offensive did not continue for long. The group of cavalry which had advanced beforehand

turned back. Rather than rushing the

^{Unstoppable Silver Flow}
[Silver Meteor Army], they were aiming to cut off their retreat.

“They're probably trying to invite us into a narrow path like yesterday, but I won't fall for the same trick.”

Kashim would triumph over the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] by encircling them and crushing them. As he handed down that order, a new change occurred in the battlefield

.

Close to one thousand shadows appeared from behind the rocks and attacked them. Seeing this, Kashim could not utter a single sound due to his astonishment.

The enemy's new troops were clad in the armor of the Muozinel Army. They wore thick leather armor, and their heads were wrapped with a black cloth. Since the sun was sinking, it was difficult to distinguish the color of their skin, and the decreasing visibility of the battlefield was only making it difficult to react quickly to this attack. The battlefield changed quickly.

In yesterday's fight, Tigre had his men strip the armor from the corpses. This time, he had them wear it to confuse the enemy.

The ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] impersonated the Muozinel cavalry and stabbed the enemy relentlessly. So as not to attack their own side, they had decided on a keyword beforehand.

If one said bear, they would respond with rabbit.

“To use a child's fairy tale in this situation...”

“Clarity is important. It's easy to understand if it's easy to say.”

Rurick and Tigre exchanged such a conversation.

Using the childish keyword, the many people from the Muozinel Army fell off their steeds in the confusion. It was difficult for them to stand back up.

In addition, the cavalry were attacked first during their charge. After being encircled, the Muozinel Army nearly

collapsed, being forced into a situation where they could not break through. The [Silver Meteor Army] ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} then quickly ran from the battlefield.

Kashim wanted to order his men to pursue the enemy, but he did not.

His infantry could not catch up, and sending the cavalry could lead to his troops attacking themselves. Also, at this time of year, it was nearly impossible to see the enemy as they retreated.

Kashim clenched his fists strong enough to start bleeding, and his eyes were bloodshot. An aide hesitantly called out to him in a low voice to give him a report.

“--- The slaves.”

The aide had not understood what he said. Kashim took a deep breath and expelled all his hatred.

“Tell the soldiers. Bring ten of the male and female slaves to me on their knees. I will buy them for gold. First come, first served.”

On this day, the Muozinel Army had lost nearly one thousand troops. With their second loss, nearly ten percent of their forces had been lost and they had gained nothing in battle.

Kashim had no other choice. Rather, it was something he could not help but choose.

The next morning, Kashim brought the slaves before the soldiers and had his soldiers that could speak the language of Brune repeat his words.

“To the honorless soldiers of Brune who sneak around beneath the rocks like worms! Show yourself. If you bastards have courage, then challenge us from the front in a dignified manner befitting a soldier! If you wish to continue your petty tricks and attack us from your hiding, this is how we will respond!”

As Kashim shouted, he beheaded the ten men, one after another. The women screamed, seeing the heads roll around and the bodies spouting blood.

“You have one koku to show yourself. The women will be next. We are prepared to do even more unless you cowards show yourselves!”

He was provoking the enemy with a threat against the slaves' lives.

Having experienced severe losses on two consecutive days, it was necessary to make use of the slaves. They were not to harbor hope. By executing them, he would be able to force them to remain obedient. Leaving the corpses of the slaves behind, the Muozinel Army began their march.

This day, the Muozinel advanced its main unit. Though three thousand strong, it was not that large if one looked at the force in its entirety.

Because the enemy was extremely small in number, they would likely not attack from the front. Yesterday they had attacked from the side, and today they had attacked from behind. Even if they attacked from the front, they would be met by three thousand soldiers.

Furthermore, they needed to protect the unit which carried food and fuel.

Depriving the enemy of food is normal in the course of war. Though they had not aimed for that today, it was possible they might soon in the future.

A group of cavalry advanced before them. When the sun reached its peak, Kashim received a report he could hardly believe.

“Five or six hundred...?”

Even if the Muozinel Army had lost 10% of its troops, they still had an overwhelming eighteen thousand troops. The number of enemies which stood against them was no more than six hundred.

“They should have at least one thousand, probably they're lurking somewhere...”

However, against so many troops, what could six hundred or one thousand troops do?

--- Maybe they don't have the power to escape.

Kashim persuaded himself in that way. There were signs of a camp having been set up, and, above all, in the past two days, the enemy would have been able to attack more intensely if they had more manpower.

“The General?”

“Probably the red haired man at the front.”

At the front of the cavalry which numbered close to six hundred, a young man with dull red hair rode a horse. He could not think a man who wore leather armor and carried a bow could be the General who led the army.

--- In the first place, no one in Brune would fight like this.

Brune Kingdom despised the bow. Even those of Muozinel knew this. Naturally, so did Kashim.

--- No doubt about it. There must be an ambush nearby.

The enemy before him, or the ambush, which would be the main force? Kashim gave this more thought.

--- Seeing how that red haired man looks, the ambush is likely the main force, but they might be thinking that. While my attention is on the hidden enemy, the ones before me will act.

He had seen through the enemy's plan, or so he thought. He was determined not to let this continue. He would advance his army toward the men before him. He was positive they were the main force.

“Cease these barbarous actions, brutes of Muozinel!”

The young, red haired man raised his voice. Although Kashim understood the Brune language, he would not stop his march.

“You have deprived the innocent of their lives. For that, you deserve ten thousand deaths. However, before I take your head, why is it you lawlessly set your dirty feet across our borders?”

“I'll answer you if you take the proper action.”

Kashim ridiculed him.

“Throw your arms away. Crawl on the ground and become slaves. I will be a generous master and tell you. I will even sell you to kind masters.”

Jeers were thrown from the soldiers of Muozinel hearing their Commander's words. They prepared arrows and nocked their bows. They would soon reach a distance where arrows would reach.

At that time, a battle cry was heard. Just as Kashim predicted, there was an ambush. He looked up with a smile but could not believe his eyes.

It was not the Red Horse of Brune but the Black Dragon of the Zhcted Kingdom which jumped into his view.

Kashim had heard that a small group had invited the Zhcted Army into their country.

However, he believed he would not encounter them. They had no reason to come. He did not believe they would shed their blood to protect Brune.

That was Kashim's conclusion.

Kashim was not the only one who could not move from surprise. All the soldiers of Muozinel stood speechless.

Zhcted lay to the north of Muozinel, so small skirmishes were not unusual. He was used to seeing the Black ^{Zitnirtra} Dragon Flag, and, of course, he had no good memories relating to it.

“Charge!”

With a cry, Rurick led the Zhcted soldiers while Tigre issued commands to the soldiers of Brune.

Unstoppable Silver Flow

With that cry, the [Silver Meteor Army] attacked the Muozinel Army from two directions. With the troops in a daze, they allowed their enemy to approach them.

Their dazzling swords reflected the sunshine, but they were immediately stained in mud and blood. Rather than carrying a spear, they held swords and attacked either the head or the abdomen.

A rain of arrows pierced the troops' eyes. Those who fell to the ground were mercilessly crushed beneath the horses. The wilderness full of dirt was quickly covered in blood and corpses.

Unstoppable Silver Flow

The [Silver Meteor Army] cut deeply into the Muozinel troops, but with their small numbers, they could not break through the three thousand strong unit.

Kashim looked up and glanced at the bloodshed throughout the battlefield. Though it was regrettable that he was caught by surprise, he was finally able to think. If his troops endured here, the soldiers to the rear would catch up.

If they could surround the enemy, the Muozinel Army would be victorious.

A chill ran down Kashim's spine as he almost smiled in satisfaction. This feeling had saved him many times. It was his intuition, so to speak.

Kashim thought the enemy had closed in, but he denied it immediately.

Even if the enemy had closed the distance on him, they were still three hundred alsin (approximately three hundred meters) away.

Furthermore, that three hundred alsin was filled with Muozinel soldiers. No one boasted for the strength to pass that distance easily, nor would arrows reach that distance.

--- It will reach.

Kashim heard a voice in his ear. It was as if an evil spirit spoke to him.

At the same time, an arrow flew straight toward Kashim.

Usually, the death of the General is concealed as much as

possible because it would mean defeat. A similar person would be immediately chosen as a substitute to deceive ally and enemy alike. This would buy time to allow for a withdrawal from battle.

However, that did not happen this time.

The sky was clear, the sun was overhead, and there were many nearby on the battlefield.

Furthermore, Kashim's head, which was wrapped in cloth, was hit. There was no possibility he survived.

Like a wave rippling across the surface of the water, a fear spread across the Muozinel soldiers.

The ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army], as if waiting for that reaction, let out a war cry.

The twenty thousand Muozinel troops, before their two thousand strong enemy, lost the will to fight.

They promptly recovered from their stupor. While the Commanders were scolding their men, they were killed by arrows, further lowering their morale.

The first to collapse were those in the rear who had not participated in battle but heard of the death of their General. One person, then two retreated, then others turned their backs away. Their arms were tossed aside and they ran down the highway.

The Muozinel Army collapsed like broken dolls.

Those fighting the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] began pulling back following the movements of those behind them. Those who continued to fight were cut down, those who turned away were pursued.

Tigre led the soldiers of Alsace toward the front and showed no mercy. He displayed his rage for the death of the ten men earlier that morning.

“Chase after them! Leave none alive!”

While shooting arrows, Tigre called out instructions, but he did not let emotion sway him.



Though the Muozinel Army had fallen, they were still made of eighteen thousand men. Once they regained their calm and obtained a new leader, Tigre and his men would be defeated in an instant.

While they were still lost, he had to teach them fear.

“... Your plan was beyond their expectations.”

While Tigre continued to shoot, Rurick drew near on his horse, bringing fresh arrows with him. Tigre nodded silently without breaking his severe countenance.

Kashim was not foolish at all, but he relaxed his guard. More accurately, he had not realized to the very end that he had let his guard down.

Over two battles, Tigre had impressed his inferiority of numbers to Kashim and threw them into confusion with disguises.

In response to that, Kashim took a formation good against a small amount of troops and weakened his flank and rear guards. That was Tigre's aim.

Still, had Tigre fought only with the sword, Kashim would have been able to defend himself with his wall of soldiers and would have remained alive. The same would apply if Tigre's arrows could not go beyond three hundred alsin.

For the people of Brune who were poor at archery, it was impossible to think someone could shoot accurately at three hundred alsin. Not even Kashim could predict that.

Seeing Tigre standing at the forefront of his troops brought pity rather than anger to Kashim's mind, and he had made a decision he might normally not have because of that. He had killed innocent people, and Tigre would not remain silent.

Tigre had used all of this to grip victory from a very dangerous situation. He had cut his distance from Kashim to approximately three hundred alsin and defeated him as quickly as possible. It was possible Tigre might have lost this battle if even a single breeze picked up.

“Rurick, may I leave the pursuit to you?”

Tigre asked for confirmation once the battlefield gradually began moving south toward Muozinel. From his expression and voice, Rurick understood Tigre's feelings.

“Leave it to me.”

Tigre thanked the bald Zhcted Knight and sped away with Gerard and a few Alsace soldiers to where the slaves had been cut down.

To protect themselves from the Muozinel soldiers that ran away with a momentum comparable to an avalanche and the [Silver Meteor Army] who chased after them, they balled up on the ground. The blood poured down on them, corpses were strewn on top, and their screams could be heard across the battlefield. They were frightened by the sound of horses.

Tigre dismounted and walked to them in compromise.

“It's fine now.”

With a subdued voice, a woman nearby called out for help. Tigre nodded and smiled gently.

Their suspicion turned to joy. Many other survivors called out as well, and there were others who shook their heads in disbelief. There were many who were unable to understand the situation and simply sat in blank surprise

.

“... Why didn't you come earlier!?”

Suddenly, one of the men shouted in accusation.

Although the man was bound by rope and could not move, he glared at Tigre with intense feelings as he shed tears.

“If you had shown yourself this morning! If you had shown up at that time, he wouldn't have died...”

Tigre stood rooted to the spot.

The ones who moved were Gerard and the soldiers of Alsace.

“That is...”

The words Gerard wanted to say to the people they had helped could not be said.

Tigre reached out to restrain him. To protect them, soldiers from Alsace had fallen. Tigre looked at the man with a sad expression.

“I'm sorry.”

Hearing Tigre's words and seeing his attitude, the man inhaled deeply with surprise. Though many words were rampaging within him, they would not come out. He sat down with his head hung.

Tigre ordered for them to be untied and for clothes to be prepared for the women. Tigre also helped sever the ropes with his dagger.

“Um...”

As he unbound the people, a small girl spoke to Tigre fearfully. She gave the impression that she was a naïve girl about the same age as Tigre. While she hid her body with her hands and what remained of the torn clothing, she bowed deeply to Tigre.

“Thank you for your help... And for completing my father's revenge.”

Tigre dimly understood. One of the men who died earlier this morning was likely this girl's father.

“I'm sorry. That man just now, I don't think he was wrong. I understand his feelings, but... I wished to thank you.”

Tigre gave off a complex expression showing his mixed feelings upon hearing the girl's sincere words.

She had hid nothing. Her frank words expressed how she felt for being rescued, but it was clear she had swallowed words of criticism.

Though he did not know how to process his emotions, Tigre thanked her without showing any tears.

“You have my thanks as well.”

Those from the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] who participated in battle were well over one thousand. It was almost the entire army.

They were unable to endure their fatigue, and their bodies were covered in injuries. As soon as they returned

from the place with several thousands of corpses and unimaginable amounts of blood, many collapsed and fell asleep. Without looking carefully, it was impossible to tell whether they were living or dead.

Since they had run to Agnes from Territoire, they did not have time to rest and were further troubled by the sandy hills and cliffs. They had fought the Muozinel Army for three consecutive days.

Though Tigre had allowed the soldiers to rest, it was as little as he could possibly allow them to.

They had gone through many battles and given chase. They brandished their arms and ran from one end of the battlefield to another. It was unavoidable that his men would drop their arms and collapse in this situation.

The Muozinel Army lost more than three thousand in this fight, bringing their death toll to above five thousand when including the battles from the previous two days. It was a quarter of their entire army that fell in the lands of Agnes.

On the other hand, about two hundred soldiers from the [Unstoppable Silver Flow Meteor Army] had lost their lives.

There were fifteen hundred still living. Amongst those, four-hundred sixty-two were injured, both serious and minor. It was a narrow victory, a miraculous result, given their current state.

Gerard was unable to cope with an unusual feeling; he was not sure how to report the results to Tigre. He decided to say the sacrifice was small since they stopped twenty thousand troops.

However, when hearing the report, Tigre's expression sunk, and he did not look like the victor. It was not simply out of fatigue.

There was no time for Tigre, Rurick, or Gerard to rest. What they needed to do was to gather the soldiers who could move and collect their spoils.

The Muozinel Army that retreated left their food and fuel. Because the money and goods they plundered remained as well, they were divided amongst the soldiers and the people.

Gerard had not played an active part on the battlefield, but he fully demonstrated his talents. While the
Unstoppable Silver Flow
[Silver Meteor Army] secured the supplies, he was able

to efficiently distribute the food and fuel so it would last until they arrived in Territoire.

“So we have no choice but to send them to Territoire?”

Hearing the report from the young man with brown hair, Tigre asked to which Gerard nodded.

“I believe you have heard from them as well, Earl Vorn. When their towns and villages were raided, their livelihoods were destroyed. Telling them to return in the coldness of winter is no different from telling them to build a house on their own.”

“Though I understand... Will Territoire be fine?”

There were many towns and villages who went to Territoire to escape from the fires of war. Though Tigre's worries were natural, the son of the Lord of Territoire simply shrugged his shoulders.

“For two thousand people, we have no other choice.”

Tigre was unable to object. If he accepted them into Alsace, it was easy to see his land collapsing immediately, and Aude, governed by Massas, was too far away.

"I understand. Please arrange that."

As he said that, Rurick walked into his tent.

"... Lord Tigrevurmud, I would like to speak to you."

Though he smiled brightly as usual, there was an awkwardness to it. Though tired, Tigre saw through it. After issuing instructions, he left the place with Rurick and Gerard.

"What's wrong?"

"In our pursuit, we have taken some of the soldiers captive."

This is what Tigre had ordered. He needed to know their purpose and the state of the Muozinel Kingdom. After getting rid of his false smile, Rurick's gloomy expression surprised Tigre and Gerard.

"They all said [We are the Advance Force who were to sweep through the land]."

Tigre's feet stopped. He was unable to move and the shadow in Rurick's face spread to Tigre and Gerard's in an instant.

They had racked their brain without sleep to fight against an army this size. They had sacrificed much, yet this was only their vanguard?

“To think that's all they were...”

Though his body began to stagger, Tigre managed to hold his ground. His heart beat violently from the unprecedented tension.

“Their main force?”

“According to them, thirty thousand. I will send the reconnaissance unit for confirmation.”

--- *Thirty thousand...*

He could not voice it. The number echoed within Tigre's body.

“... No, I doubt it would end with thirty thousand.”

Gerard shook his head and took a deep breath. Tigre nodded with a difficult expression. Though they had broken the enemy of twenty thousand, they did not exterminate them all.

“The soldiers who have retreated will likely add another ten thousand to the main unit.”

“... After twenty thousand, we have forty thousand? If they add the last ten thousand, it will take them some time to reorganize. They may not start today, but they might start tomorrow.”

Within several days, the Muozinel Army, a large force of forty thousand, would appear in Agnes.

Furthermore, his troops were exhausted. They would need complete rest today; it would be impossible for them to move at all. In addition, there were two thousand extra people. Even if they were to flee, their marching speed would decrease significantly. It was possible they would be caught before they left Agnes.

A heavy silence wrapped about the three. Gerard was the one to break it.

“What will you do, Earl Vorn?”

Tigre stared blankly at the young man with brown hair

“What of the future? Will you flee, or will you ask for assistance?”

Tigre realized the meaning of Gerard's words. He was speaking frankly without hiding any anger.

“... Are you saying that seriously?”

“... No, it was a slip of the tongue. I apologize.”

Gerard bowed deeply. On the other hand, the one to move was not Tigre but Rurick. He hit the young man as he stood upright, forcing Gerard to stagger back a step or two.

Though Tigre looked at Rurick in surprise, he did not immediately criticize him and waited for his excuse. He was tired and it was clear he had held back. If Rurick were serious, Gerard would have done more than just stagger.

“... You, how much further do you intend to press Lord Tigrevurmud?”

With his fist clenched, Rurick glared at Gerard. Gerard's smile distorted as he was held up.

"I cannot say. For now, that will be all."

Tigre was not particularly happy, knowing Gerard clearly admitted he was testing Tigre.

"Is that bad mouth of yours also purposeful?"

"No, that is who I am."

Rurick looked as if he would fly into a rage but controlled himself. Tigre gave a deep sigh. In a situation with no room for error, he had to know what Gerard's intentions were.

"I believe your father placed your trust in me."

"Father is father. I am me."

Gerard responded impudently while rubbing his face.

"I was afraid that, in your desire to defend Alsace, you would abandon Territoire. If you think of Alsace first, it is not an impossible thought for you to think of. That is why I wish to know what kind of man you are."

“In that case, shouldn't you be trying to gain our trust instead?”

Gerard shrugged after seeing Rurick's severe expression.

“You have already obtained father's trust. Even if I earn Earl Vorn's hatred with this, it will end should father cut ties with me later. Father would cut me away without hesitation. You will not abandon me.”

A troublesome man appeared once again. Tigre felt this way from the bottom of his heart.

“Earl Vorn. Though this is not the time to say this, you are what is reflected in the eyes of others.”

“Eyes of others?”

“Though a citizen of Brune, you insist on using the bow, and after becoming a prisoner of war to Zhcted, you sold your position as an aristocrat of a small province in the frontier to fight against the large political power, Duke Thenardier... For those unfamiliar with your personality, what would people think upon hearing this?”

“They would see me as the one who provoked a fight.”

Though he answered emotionally, Gerard laughed it away. Though Tigre was particularly interested in it, he could only nod. This sort of thing was likely unavoidable

.

“Well, I understand what you are trying to say. I will take care.”

“Thank you for listening. If I were to add one more thing, the man of Zhcted with a barren wilderness on his head admires you too much. You should not use him as a reference.”

“... Lord Tigrevurmud. What will you do from now on?”

With his self control maximized, Rurick returned their conversation to its original topic. Tigre also pulled himself together and bowed in assent. Gerard as well.

“Apart from the soldiers, can the people move? I would like to make some distance.”

“They have been bound with rope and are too tired. For now, that is impossible.”

“... Then please examine the number of men and women. It may be cold, but we may have to make the men defend the women. Until we reach Territoire, have them take a weapon from one of the Muozinel corpses.”

Though a regrettable situation, the
Unstoppable Silver Flow
[Silver Meteor Army] was in a position where he was forced to make such a cruel decision.

Furthermore, a force of two thousand was a powerful weapon. If the men were given spears and marched alongside, any enemy would be more hesitant to approach them.

After planning their actions, the three began working immediately.

That evening, the two thousand people and the
Unstoppable Silver Flow
[Silver Meteor Army] began marching. They trudged along with heavy steps, cliffs to their right and left. Though everyone understood the Muozinel Army was following after them, their bodies did not move properly. Their fatigue which had accumulated would not recover with just a little rest.

--- *This is bad...*

Tigre and Rurick looked at each other. Though slow, their marching speed was better than expected. They could not be forced to rush, though.

It happened around mid day; a report came from reconnaissance in regards to the position and movements of the Muozinel Army.

“Approximately three to four thousand Muozinel Cavalry are approaching.”

Tigre made a quick decision.

“Rurick, take command of the soldiers and gather all the remaining arrows.”

“Are you doing something crazy again?”

The Zhcted Knight looked at him with amazement and anxiety mixed in his face. Tigre shrugged his shoulders.

“We need to slow their movements somehow. We also have a headwind right now.”

Though he might slow the enemy's movements down, return fire would be sure to come.

“Please take people skilled in archery.”

It was a condition he conceded for Rurick's sake. Tigre thanked him. After gathering ten cavalry, he left, kicking up dust as he ran down the highway.

After a quarter koku, a Vahram – the God of War worshiped by Muozinel – flag came into view. Tigre stopped his horse, nocked an arrow, and quickly shot it.

The arrow drew a large arc in the sky and cut through the wind. It hit its mark, causing the soldier at the front to fall off his horse. The Zhcted soldiers followed Tigre's lead and shot arrows, felling some of the enemies.

Though the Muozinel Army stopped moving due to the sudden attack, they quickly regained calm and charged forward, the sound of hooves rumbling across the earth. Though they also shot arrows, due to the distance and the wind conditions not being in their favor, they fell short of Tigre.

Tigre and the others ran with their horses, maintaining a set distance. No matter how many they shot down, the enemy continued to charge forward. A cold sweat spread across Tigre's temple.

--- If this keeps up, we'll meet Rurick and the main force...

It was at that time when the sound of horses running increased. Though Tigre thought it could have been reinforcements, there was no dust cloud coming from behind the Muozinel soldiers.

The Muozinel Army also noticed it and stopped their horses. Tigre noticed the sound had come from above them. Tigre looked up for the first time.

--- Black ^{Zirnitra} Dragon Flag...?

Waving in the wind was the unmistakable color of the Zhcted Kingdom. Below it was a blue spear drawn diagonally on a white background. Tigre recognized it immediately.

A group of cavalry ran down the steep slope skillfully and entered the space between Tigre and Muozinel.

At the lead was a spear wielding girl of 15 or 16 years. She brought her horse before the stunned Tigre.

She was small in stature and had blue hair to her shoulders. She seemed flushed since she was running on horseback. She had adorable features and pupils like ice

from which the cold shined through. Her clothes made of blue silk matched the color of her hair. In her hand was a spear with a short handle.

Seeing Tigre's face, she smiled in a somewhat ill-natured manner.

“It has been a while, Tigrevurmud Vorn.”

It was the Vanadis who governed Olmutz.

She was the [Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave],
Ludmira Lurie.

Laziris
[Rainbow Eyes]

A light snow began falling, and the cold was made worse due to the dry wind, further numbing the people walking in the midst of winter. The gray sky mirrored the chilled earth.

Ellen and her troops had finally left the Vosyes Mountains and were crossing LeitMeritz toward Legnica.

“Eleanora-sama. Snow...”

Lim's hand extended along with her voice to brush snow out of Ellen's hair, her eyes clearly showing concern. Ellen smiled in reassurance. After letting out a deep breath, she looked to the cloudy sky.

“Thank you, Lim. I'm fine.”

The Vanadis with silver-white hair changed her expression to a serious one immediately.

“--- There are some missing.”

“Not a small number either, since they're going on a forced march through LeitMeritz.”

“I don't care if we lose another one thousand, we're maintaining speed.”

Crossing the Vosyes mountains was a difficult task. Since they had entered her territory of LeitMeritz, she could ask some of the nearby towns and villages for housing for her troops that left as a Vanadis.

What Ellen required now was speed.

Ellen suddenly glanced back at the gray scenery, as if searching for something. A wry smile floated to her face as she shook her head.

“... Were you thinking of Lord Tigrevurmud?”

Lim's question seemed to be her guess based on Ellen's gesture. Ellen, unable to deny it, flushed red for a moment. Lim sighed in amazement.

“We have parted from him long ago. How many days do you think have passed? We are already in Zhcted.”

Candid advice came from her long-time adjutant. Far from reflecting on it, an ill-natured smile flashed on Ellen's face.

“You as well, Lim. Do you care to explain your shameful behavior in the war council last night? Despite it being only a quarter koku, twice you almost said [Lord Tigrevurmud]. You're lucky it was just the two of us.”

Lim's blue eyes opened widely, having been hit in a sore point. She began to fluster, trying to find an excuse, but eventually she looked down while blushing.

Ellen, now satisfied, stopped her teasing and smiled sentimentally.

“Honestly... We met him in the autumn. Not even half a year has passed.”

In the first place, their meeting on the battlefield was not exactly friendly.

Even so, Tigre's presence had become a big thing within Ellen and Lim.

“Lim, I think that's another one of his faults.”

“His faults...?”

Lim looked curiously toward Ellen while she nodded, her ruby pupils shining brightly.

“It's always like that. He doesn't get up in the morning , when we try to teach him how to use a sword or spear, he finds reasons to run away, and when he is being lectured on strategy, his concentration breaks after a quarter koku.”

Ellen stopped speaking here. Lim was counting on her fingers as Ellen gave reasons before and was continuing on in her head. Ellen stopped as she smiled at Lim, who seemed happy.

“... Is there something on my face?”

“No, but you seem a bit happy when I mentioned his faults.”

Lim's face look dissatisfied upon hearing Ellen's evaluation. Her golden hair tied on the left of her hood shook.

“It is hardly a good thing. I wish he could become more solid like you. If he put the effort into the other military arts, he could do them properly. If I am not firm with him here, he'll simply sit on his backside all day...”

“Speaking of backside, he still hasn't seen your chest, has he?”

“... What are you talking about?”

“Yeah, should I say he's unlucky, or should I say his fate is good? You could say he's absent-minded, or maybe he's unexpectedly shrewd. I think you're the only one he hasn't seen bathing. Even Sophie and Ludmira were seen.”

Although Ellen said she did not particularly care, when Lim heard this, her face was flush with embarrassment, then went red with rage before finally settling on a pale complexion.

“... I see. When I return, it seems I must have a chat with Lord Tigrevurmud. Depending on the situation, he will require education rather than a lecture – No, it will be necessary to teach him properly...”

Lim assembled a schedule in her head for the future.

“Eleanora-sama, though you have seen all his faults, what do you think of him?”

“I wonder...”

Ellen put her thoughts together, her eyes gazing on the gray sky above.

“I think he's pretty good. Though he has plenty of faults, depending on how you look at him, you can think of them as his virtues.”

Though Lim had misgivings as to whether or not this would become a conversation on love affairs, it did not. The talk ended there.

The amount of snow falling into their view had increased significantly.

“... Lim, should we speed up a little more?”

Immediately changing her train of thought, Ellen asked Lim with an earnest expression. Lim quickly thought about it in her mind. Until now, Ellen had restrained herself and settled on the pace they traveled at currently.

If they increased their speed and distance today, they would require rest and may not be able to travel the next day. They feared the horses would collapse in the worst case.

However, they were quite near Legnica, and they were afraid they may be buried beneath the snow, so doing something slightly irrational may be called for.

“From here, we will reach Legnica within a half koku, but the men and the horses have accumulated a lot of fatigue, and we have more leaving...”

“I don't care. It won't be possible to stop by any towns or villages once we enter Legnica.”

Ellen made a prompt decision. She pulled her horse to a stop and sternly instructed her men.

“Since it's snowing heavily now, we're aiming to hit Legnica a koku early. Those who don't want to follow can stay here, got it?”

Though the soldiers responded with a cry loud enough not to be drowned out by the wind, the fatigue ran deep in their faces.

Brushing away the snow, the LeitMeritz Army led by Ellen ran quickly through the wilderness.

--- Sasha is sick, I can't let her down...

Amongst the seven Vanadis, Sasha always won against Ellen when the two competed. She was so much more powerful – simply put, she was strong.

If Sasha were healthy, even if the other Vanadis attacked Legnica, Ellen would worry about her body and would come running to help.

However, Sasha was currently inflicted with a terrible illness. She spends nearly half the day in bed, so it was unreasonable to think she could stand on the battlefield as the General.

---It doesn't matter how many enemies there are... I will help her!

Her fury was visible in her ruby eyes. Ellen rushed ahead on her horse.

By the time they reached Legnica, her troops had fallen to little more than one thousand. Ellen took a break with

her troops, but after a quarter koku, they took to horse once again.

By the time they reached Sasha's official residence, the sun had already fallen. The number of soldiers following Ellen was only five hundred.

It was Sophie's role to arbitrate whenever Ellen and Ludmira had an argument; however, two years before, it was Sasha's job. Since her health deteriorated, it became impossible for her to leave Legnica.

The way Sasha ended their quarrels was to pull the two apart and listen to their complaints separately. The next day, the three would gather and the two would reconcile.

She had used force only once.

In an empty square just outside of the Royal Palace in the King's Capital Silesia, Ludmira and Ellen had taken out their Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool and were fighting for some reason neither could remember.

Ellen's Arifal had controlled the wind while Ludmira's Lavi^{Viralt}as froze the atmosphere. The two exchanged a

violent glance. At that time, a harsh voice interrupted their duel.

“... What are you two doing?”

At that time, Ellen and Ludmira were 14 while Sasha was 19, and the two had not yet been Vanadis for more than a year. Sasha had been chosen by her Dragonic Tool when she was 15.

The two could not resist against her dignity and strength.

“This girl...”

Ellen and Ludmira both pointed at one another. Sasha simply sighed in amazement.

“I got it. I will be your opponent, then.”

Sasha's Dragonic Tool was a pair of swords sheathed on either side of her waist. They shined gold and vermillion respectively, making no sound as they were unsheathed.

Sasha was known as the
[Hidden Princess of the ^{Falpram}Luminous Flame] and the

[Princess of the Dancing Blades]^{Cortisa}. The first impression one would have of her is calm and gentle.

Her short cut black hair which rested on her shoulders and her narrow face gave her a neutral presence. Her skin was pale and she was more on the lean side.

Her tone was also mild, but not the sort that would coerce others.

Nevertheless, both Ludmira and Ellen flinched when she took up her Twin Swords.

“What's wrong? If you've gone so far as to pull out your sword and spear, surely you want a fight, right?”

“It, it is unrelated to you.”

Ludmira sharply pointed that out. Ellen vigorously nodded in agreement.

“This is between me and her. You can act as judge.”

However, Sasha showed no signs of backing down.

“If children do not wish to listen, then I will not remain quiet. Since you two don't seem to want to talk to each other, I will make you understand with force.”

Her golden blade was turned to Ellen while the vermillion blade was turned to Ludmira. Sasha continued speaking quietly.

“Since it's troublesome, you two can come at me together. If either of you injures me, I will acknowledge my defeat. I will never stick my nose in your business again, and I will listen to anything you two have to say today.”

She was being generous.

A fire burned violently within Ellen and Ludmira's eyes.

The two had obtained their Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool when they were 14 and were confident in their skill. Sasha's words strongly stimulated their pride. In short, she provoked them.

The two who were involved in a cat fight just a moment ago exchanged a quick look and kicked off the

ground. They pounced simultaneously from the left and right, yet Sasha remained stationary.

In a single moment, two sounds, without a single gap between them, rang out in succession.

Sasha coldly looked down at Ellen and Ludmira who were lying on the ground. She had struck them a powerful blow and broken their posture, forcing them to fall to their knees.

Her Dragonic Tool remained in both hands. Even at their best, they could not force her to drop either of them.

“... Are you done?”

Ellen and Ludmira feebly nodded. They were given an attack which knocked the energy out of their bodies. They could not see it but the wall was too high since the difference in their skill was overwhelming.

Sasha quietly sheathed her Twin Swords and turned to Ellen and Ludmira after wiping the dust off her body.

“Since you two are young, it can't be helped that you will fight, but it is unforgivable to turn your weapons to one another. This is even more true of Dragonic Tools...”

The two did not consider the words of the 19 year old who looked down at them prudently. She had fought two of them and moved in an instant as if she were a phantom. Furthermore, the numbness in their right hands had still not disappeared.

When Ellen described this story to Sophie later, she narrowed her eyes and smiled as if she were suppressing her laughter.

“Incidentally, I never told you or Mira. One year ago, Sasha had a practice against three Vanadis at once. It was a complete victory for her.”

One was me. Sophie's golden hair waved as she pointed to herself.

“Considering your age, you were strong enough, but Sasha has been on top for a long time. It would definitely be difficult to win against that Vanadis one on one.”

Sasha's imperial palace was lined with white marble and sandstone. It gave off a strange sense of taste and yet was

still strange. Though no one had changed its design, no one bothered to worry, since it was a design meant to calm people down.

Ellen passed through immediately.

Because of the heavy snows, she borrowed a building just outside the public courtyard for her soldiers to rest in while the horses remained in the courtyard. Lim and Ellen followed the servant down a corridor where fires were lit at intervals and stood before Sasha's door.

“Sasha, how is her condition?”

“I can't say it is very good.”

The aged servant who worked in the palace longer than Sasha had a hoarse voice, but his words were clear.

“I believe Alexandra-sama would be delighted to speak to you, but please stop after a half koku. Allow her to rest and you may speak to her again after dinner.”

Ellen nodded. The servant entered Sasha's room first and bowed before confirming the two could enter.

“Should I leave my sword with you?”

Though Ellen called it to attention, the servant refused.

“We recognize that a Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool is with a Vanadis at all time. Above all, you are Alexandra-sama's precious friend, and you have a strong faith in Limlisha.”

His words held weight. The old man was three, four times older than Ellen. He had also served the previous Vanadis whom Sasha succeeded. After bowing, Ellen pushed open the door.

It was a simple room with the minimal amount of furniture and a simple decorated window showing the winter. There was also a brick fireplace with a flame burning brightly within.

“--- It's been a while.”

Sasha, the [Hidden Princess of the Luminous Flame]^{Falpram}, sat up in bed and received Ellen with a smile. Her Twin Swords lay atop her knee, glittering gold and vermillion.

The Bright Flame Bargren. The name of her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool was the [Twin Blades of Demon^{Toki no Sojin}ic Force].

“Sorry. You had to come all this way.”

Ellen did not respond at once. She walked to the bed and stood before Sasha.

“It's natural that I come help you.”

Her desires and nostalgia as she reminisced changed to joy and relief. Ellen obediently smiled.

--- *She's gotten worse.*

When they met last summer, her black hair was cut to an even length down to her shoulders. It was a little disordered, now, and her skin seemed more pale.

The flesh on her hand which extended from her white clothes were thinner. After hesitating for a moment, Ellen grasped it with both hands as if it were precious.



“So you still dress like that.”

Sasha's favorite clothes were either black or white. She would wear solid black on her upper or lower body which let out a glimpse of white clothing beneath it. Ellen had seen it a few times. Though it depended on the mood of the person in question, Ellen had only seen her wear black on the battlefield, and she typically wore white outside.

“When I go to sleep, my subordinates prepare white. I make sure to wear my clothing thankfully.”

Sasha recommended a chair for Lim to sit at. So as not to obstruct the two Vanadis, Lim bowed down before taking a seat.

“Though there are a lot of things to talk about, let's start with the important ones. It might be a bit rude, but please tell me about your land...”

Ellen's eyes exuded a powerful fearlessness and the will to fight. She would not forgive those who would harm her best friend. It was necessary she hear the circumstances in detail from Sasha.

Sasha did not answer immediately. Rather, she waited until Ellen settled down, even if just a little.

“It's Elizavetta.”

The moment she heard the name, Ellen's calm expression became angry. Lim pressed down on her hand quietly from the side to keep her from standing up abruptly.

“Eleanora-sama. Your conversation with Alexandra-sama has not yet ended.”

A detached voice sounded to appease her Lord who was on the verge of exploding. Ellen sat in the chair, her silver-white hair swaying about.

“So it really is her.”

“Did you know?”

Sasha looked lightly at Ellen, who let out a deep breath full of heavy emotions.

“The territory held by a Vanadis nearest Legnica would be my LeitMeritz and Lebus that she governs. The rest is simply a process of elimination. Sophie returned to

Zhcted with me, and Ludmira would have to pass through my territory to get here.”

Ellen counted the Vanadis on her fingers as she named them.

“I heard Olga left her territory and has not contacted anyone. Valentina's territory is far away, so I thought it may have been Elizavetta.”

Ellen smiled proudly.

Though she did not say it, there was another reason Ellen thought it was her.

--- It seems Elizavetta is on good terms with Thenardier and Ganelon...

For instance, Elizavetta may have acted to force Ellen to return to Zhcted.

If she made her move, it would be Ellen's obligation as a Vanadis to move in turn.

--- However, Elizavetta... That [Rainbow Eyes]^{Laziris}, she wouldn't do this just to attack me. What kind of reasons could she have.

What she thought did not appear on her face at all. Rather, Ellen asked about Sasha.

“What's with her. What reason is she giving for moving her soldiers?”

Sasha smiled wryly and turned her gaze to Lim. Lim nodded apologetically in return; though there may have been no other possibility, Sasha had guessed what Ellen was thinking. She had already labeled Elizavetta as evil.

“Ellen. I want you to listen calmly.”

After her introductory remark, Sasha began explaining while looking at the fireplace.

“--- In the middle of summer, Elizavetta and I cooperated to subdue some pirates off the coast.”

Sasha, who governed Legnica, and Elizavetta, who governed Lebus, were both in charge of territories in northwest Zhcted.

The two cooperated in important situations. Any pirates that escaped their attacks would run away and hide and then return when they had the chance, so it was natural the two cooperated for the clean up.

“The extermination was done quite easily. She and I were considerably superior, though I was unable to go personally with my body...”

The problems happened after the event.

“She complained that my army directed the pirates toward her own, and she was forced with the majority of the burden.”

“Is that true?”

“My subordinates naturally said they did not, however , I could not tell what happened with just the report.”

Sasha moved her fingers though the air as she drew a rough map of the terrain and troop movements. Lim and Ellen looked on with difficult expressions. They had no experience with subjugating pirates, but they understood the flow of battle and the soldier's movements well.

That is why they could understand Sasha's claims and felt Elizavetta was intent on accusing her.

“Regarding the pirate subjugation, I got her to come here in advance so we could discuss the plan and draw up a contract, but neither of us assumed this would happen.”

“But there is no clear proof of malicious intent here. Such flows on the battlefield are not unusual.”

“Yes. I said it was unintentional, but she was not convinced.”

“Were there any other problems? Such as distribution of the spoils...”

Lim asked since one army may have taken a significant amount more, but Sasha shook her head.

“Although I re-investigated things, I could find nothing. She did not point it out, either. We were communicating via letters, but that broke off in mid-autumn.”

It was then Elizavetta commanded her troops.

“She's an impatient one.”

Ellen's arms were folded as she scowled, implying she did not like her.

“Under these circumstances, I can't say I don't understand what she is saying, but I wanted to clear this up peaceably.”

Ellen looked pensive when Sasha responded. She placed her hands on the Twin Swords over her knees.

“If only I could move---”

A shadow of a smile appeared as she stroked the handle of her weapons.

“These children have judged that no one else is qualified to be Vanadis and have not separated. If they did, I would not need to rely on you, but they won't leave...”

She spoke as if she were talking to children who required a lot of care. Though their appearance did not change, they generated heat in response to their master's words. Ellen understood that much.

“They like you. Isn't that a good thing?”

As she gave those words of encouragement, the Silver Flash at her waist ran a light breeze through Ellen's silver-white hair, as if telling her it would not lose to those feelings. Ellen thanked her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool by tapping its sheathe lightly.

“Where is Elizavetta right now?”

“The latest report said she was in Vasaro. After capturing one of the fortresses near the northeastern border, she retreated without barricading herself inside. So far, there have been no reports of villages or towns being attacked.”

Ellen and Lim exchanged a suspicious glance hearing Sasha's explanation.

“... What is she thinking?”

The soldiers of Legnica couldn't push Elizavetta back. There was no force which could push back a Vanadis without overwhelming strength.

“Normally speaking, she would take the fortress and use it as a bargaining chip.”

“However, from Sasha's story, she did nothing after the fortress fell. It's like a child who started acting out in revenge.”

Ellen crossed her arms in doubt hearing Lim's opinion. Sasha smiled bitterly and spoke gently, admonishing her best friend with silver-white hair.

“I understand why you may think that, Ellen, but Elizavetta is still 17. The two of you are still children, so your evaluation is a little weak.”

“In other words, you think she has other aims?”

“Though I don't know, it is possible.”

Seeing her anxiety, Ellen began to laugh, full of ambition and the desire to fight.

“Relax, Sasha. It'll be fine since I came here. I'll beat that idiot a bit and then we can have a nice chat.”

When one investigated thoroughly, there were many possible causes for war. It could be because someone

stepped beyond their borders or because a landslide in the mountain caused problems, or even because a river froze over.

Though scholars were amazed and lamented these reasons, for the people who lived in those regions, it was a matter of life and death. Ellen knew from personal experience that fights could erupt over a single grain of wheat or a drop of water.

Whatever the reasons Elizavetta may have had, she led her soldiers on an attack against others.

“Sorry. I'll leave it to you.”

Sasha said that likely to ease Ellen's anxieties. After nodding, the two talked about a separate issue.

“By the way, I heard you were with some interesting guy these days. Sophie sent me a letter. You were in Brune, right?”

“Yeah. I'm lending a bit of my soldiers to an unreliable man. I'm sure he'd cry if I abandoned him.”

“Though it feels like he's helped us from time to time.”

Lim promptly interrupted. Ellen pouted like a sulky child.

“Even though you say that like it's not your business, he helped you as well – like sucking on your chest.”

Hearing those words, Lim pressed on her chest on reflex and blushed as she looked at her silver-white haired Lord.

“Wha... What are you saying so suddenly!”

She used all of her self control so she would not shout before an ill person.

“Isn't it true? Your attitude toward Tigre softened quite a bit after that.”

“That... I have only been evaluating his effort.”

“It's quite an odd amount of affection, then. Whenever you have free time, you're quite enthusiastic to teach him .”

“...Eleanora-sama, I could only wish you had the same enthusiasm to listen to my lectures. The moment I take my eyes off you, you leave the castle incognito.”

A relentless counterattack left Ellen speechless for a moment. Sasha smiled wryly.

“I see Ellen's habit of cutting classes has not changed.”

“It is important to inspect the affairs of my country.”

Ellen answered promptly in a dignified manner, though her face was clearly bashful.

“Is the meat you can buy from the stands delicious? How about the strawberry and grape jams on the honeyed bread? Isn't it important to investigate these things?”

“Grape, huh?”

“I like honey. Tigre – Ah, the person I'm helping said the strawberry was good. We covered the bread with honey when we entered the mountains as well. It helps mellow the acidity...”

“You two seem to have gone off track.”

Sasha looked at Ellen who spoke with interest and Lim who looked amazed. Though Ellen seemed dissatisfied, they did not have much time to speak, so the silver-white haired girl spoke of things from when she met Tigre.

However, she refrained from speaking of the black bow. She did not want to worry her friend who was in ill health.

“... Ellen, I didn't think you'd lend him your soldiers for so long.”

Sasha looked at her in amazement at first.

“I had intended to drive away Duke Thenardier's Army and learn of the situation in Brune, but things have become like this for a number of reasons.”

“Learning the status of Brune aside... Do you really like the boy that much?”

“He's an interesting guy. You'll understand if you meet him. I'm sure if you two talked, you'd like him too.”

Ellen spoke happily and proudly. Lim also nodded, despite her indifferent expression.

“He has quite a number of faults, rather, I am amazed there are so many. However, we have still lent him our aid. Rather, it seems somewhat unavoidable.”

“Is that so. He seems interesting. I would like to meet him.”

Sasha grew an interest in Tigre, hearing Ellen and Lim's evaluation.

“The fight in Brune should also end by spring. If so, I'll be happy to lend him to you.”

Ellen stretched her chest forward as if boasting about a toy she owned. Her words were wishing for her best friend's complete recovery as well as offered encouragement.

“That's right... I'll do my best to hold out a little longer.”

A knock was heard on the door; their time limit had ended. The next time Ellen would meet the black haired Vanadis would likely be before she left the imperial palace to fight Elizavetta.

“... It's already that time. It was far too short.”

Ellen gently squeezed Sasha's hand. Due to them being on her blades, there was a faint heat emitted. Despite the thinness of her fingers, Ellen's anxieties were relieved after feeling some sign of life from them.

“It was good to spend time with you again. Thank you Ellen, Lim.”

“It's good if you say that. Now get a good rest.”

Ellen slowly separated her hands. Lim also bowed politely.

The two left Sasha's room.

After Ellen and Lim left the room, Sasha gave thanks to her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool which heated in response.

“... You really don't like giving up.”

A bitter smile with many emotions floated to her face. Sasha gripped the hilts of her Twin Swords and held them out. Her muscle strength had declined and they had become heavy.

She had once wielded the
[Twin Blades of ^{Toki no Sojin} Demonic Force] freely. Even now, when
she could no longer use them, it still seemed energetic.

However, she could not even last for a quarter koku.

“If you abandon me now...”

She complained silently. Ellen did not come to help
because Legnica was attacked but because she was
unable to move.

The Dragonic Tool had not taken notice of her words
and transmitted heat to Sasha's hands. She would not be
burned, the Dragonic Tool would not heat her hands up
to that level, it was simply giving Sasha encouragement.

“I know. I won't die so young. I'll rest so I can move
about a bit more.”

She placed her swords on top of her left and right
knees again. As if to cheer on its black haired Lord, it
emitted a faint heat once again.

In the southeast of Brune in Agnes, the situation with the Muozinel Army had become strange for the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army].

Four thousand cavalry from Zhcted had joined the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army], forcing the Muozinel Army to temporarily retreat.

The thirty thousand strong Muozinel Army had added in the remaining ten thousand stragglers, resulting in a total of forty thousand troops. The General of all the troops, Kreshu Shaheen Baramir, was the younger brother of the King of Muozinel and was known as ^{Barbaros} [Red Beard].

“... The Zhcted Army?”

In a luxurious tent decorated in gold and silver, the 37 year old brother of the king received a report.

His medium build and toned physique was wrapped in silk clothing with flashy colors. A silk cloth wrapped around his head was decorated with iridescent feathers. His eyes were sunken and his nose and ears were long. His face was covered in a beard which extended down to his chest.

Though he did not look bad, given the clothes he wore, he looked more like a clown than a member of the royal family.

Still, he was not simply a [Figurehead] of the royal family. From the soldiers, he commanded respect, awe, and fear.

“I had heard a small noble from Brune had allied with the Zhcted Army... This is unexpected.”

Kreshu considered this new force. He thought they would claim to be allies and then turn around and loot the villages and towns. Kreshu wanted to avoid a troublesome battle, since it meant he would not earn as much from the spoils of war.

When the Muozinel Army attacks, they plunder the region as a matter of course. They had intended to run

through Brune Kingdom so they could build funds as they made their way to Zhcted.

--- Kashim was defeated by an army with Brune and Zhcted soldiers, and now they have an additional four thousand cavalry from Zhcted. I don't know whether they are reinforcements or not, they look like they're trying to block our invasion into Agnes.

“There are several thousand soldiers. What could be their reason? Maybe they want to monopolize the wealth they get from Brune.”

Even if he thought about it some more, a clear answer would not appear. Kreshu stopped marching for the time being and sent a messenger to the Zhcted Army.

“Our target is south Brune, and we will attack until we reach Nemetacum. If you are aiming for other regions, we should refrain from interfering with one another. If we wish for the same game, let us talk over some alcohol.”

Kreshu patted his red beard as he gave the messenger his letter.

“If the Vanadis proposes cooperation, should her beauty match the rumors, I may come back empty handed. Ha ha ha.”

He laughed happily and seriously near his close attendants. It would be no joke if a member of the royal family died from a direct meeting. Kreshu was known for his generous character, but he was not careless.

At any rate, the messenger headed to the Zhcted Army

^{Unstoppable Silver Flow}
The [Silver Meteor Army] escaped a desperate situation thanks to the Zhcted Army. Everyone understood it was temporary.

Currently, in a tent installed between the two camps, Tigre and Ludmira sat opposite one another across a table.

The tent was prepared by Ludmira and was made of two thick layers of fleece. The atmosphere of winter filling Agnes did not enter it at all. The carpet, too, was of fine quality, and did not allow the cold of the earth to pass through.

Tigre, more than warmth, felt itchy.

In the tent, only the sound of tea being brewed by Ludmira echoed.

“... Please.”

She handed him a cup made of white porcelain, wisps of steam rising from it. Before touching it, Tigre bowed deeply to Ludmira.

“First of all, thank you for your help.”

“--- Minus one.”

Ludmira's aloof voice poured over Tigre's head. Tigre looked curiously at the blue haired Vanadis with blue eyes who threw cold words at him with a disappointed face.

“We are not so intimate that I would simply come to help you... Since I have not given you a reason, your words of thanks are simply jumping to conclusions. There are times when the person will require collateral immediately.”

“We might not be that close... But you did brew this tea.”

“In the face of negotiation, I may brew this tea, even before parties I do not like. Should the negotiations fail, I may throw the contents on their face. I wonder what I shall do with you, Lord Tigrevurmud. Ah, your title was taken, so I suppose you are Tigrevurmud Vorn?”

While speaking, Ludmira continued pouring tea into the cup placed before him. She let off an inhuman smile as she tilted her cup. Though Tigre returned a smile of his own, it was stiff due to his misunderstanding.

“... Thank you for the lesson.”

“I did not prepare this place simply to lecture you.”

Even his words of thanks were rejected. Tigre ruffled his dull red hair, unable to hide his embarrassment.

“Then... May I ask why you appeared here? Furthermore, with four thousand cavalry.”

“Why do you think?”

She evaded the question. Ludmira was clearly enjoying the situation. Tigre folded his arms and tilted his head, desperately in thought.

--- Agnes lies on the border between Brune, Muozinel, and Zhcted.

Because a large Muozinel force appeared, it would be appropriate to think she came to keep an eye on the situation.

However, Ludmira appeared with such a small number. She should have continued monitoring the Brune and Muozinel Armies from a distance.

On the contrary, by showing up with four thousand troops and coming in to contact with Tigre in such an obvious manner would make the Muozinel Army suspect her of hostility.

In the end, no answer other than coming to help him appeared in his mind.

--- But this is too convenient...

Ludmira cast an upward glance at Tigre while sipping her tea, watching as he still had not answered.

“--- Do you want me?”

Hearing such an abrupt and confusing question, Tigre's body became hot and his face dyed red. After wickedly enjoying his reaction, Ludmira slowly added more.

“Do you want me and the four thousand troops I have brought? Please, tell me.”



“I do.”

“Minus two.”

Seeing him answer promptly without caring about his appearance, she immediately pointed out his fault.

“I understand your situation, but you should not bow so easily. You will easily be taken advantage of. By the way, I do not wish to partner up with such a foolish person.”

Tigre was sweating, and it was not just from the hot tea or warm air.

He had two demerits. In other words, if Tigre made another mistake, Ludmira would leave in disgust and move her troops to the other side of the cliffs.

The Muozinel Army would resume its march toward the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] which also had two thousand people and carts along with it.

They would be crushed.

Tigre is a man who has lived his life in the frontiers. He was not skillful with language.

In the end, he could think of no other action than lowering his head. He bowed once more then sat upright.

“Please help me.”

After that, he told her the Muozinel Army was attacking, and that Ellen was currently not present. He explained his situation at present.

“Though I have no means of compensating you today, I will be able to reward you after my fight with Duke Thenardier has ended.”

“You?”

“... My properties and my possessions belong to Ellen.”

Though he hesitated, Tigre lowered his head once again, his sweat falling to the table. He could find no words that might satisfy her. A bitter taste ran down his tongue and he could feel a headache. His entire body was filled with remorse.

“--- Look up.”

The voice from above was slightly flat. At first, Tigre did not think the words were directed at him, but since he was the only one present, he slowly looked up to see Ludmira smiling down at him bitterly as if she could not help it.

“You are honest and foolish to a fault. I wonder which way is better to say? Though I cannot say you have grown up much, you have not grown in a bad direction. Your sincerity has always been a strong point, so I'll give you a passing mark.”

“... So you will lend me a hand?”

Tigre had yet to swallow the situation and asked; Ludmira smiled and nodded in affirmation.

“Actually, I did not need to hear anything. I already had a rough understanding of your situation. Still, seeing your poor negotiation skills, I considered leaving.”

Again, sweat ran down Tigre's back. Though the woman who said such words had a happy and attractive smile, he could not possibly look straight at her.

“Do not relax so easily. The negotiations have not yet finished. I have only said I will consider what you say.”

While pouring tea into her now empty cup, Ludmira quietly spoke. Tigre wiped his sweat away with his arm and waited for her next words.

“Do you remember the Tatra Mountains?”

Tigre nodded. To deal with Ludmira, who was limiting Ellen's movements, he and Ellen fought her in those lands. At the top of the mountain was the fortress where Ludmira resided. It was a difficult fight for Tigre and Ellen.

“Back at the fort, do you remember when you destroyed the castle gate?”

He was startled. Tigre felt he had understood what Ludmira was demanding of him. He could only nod.

Ludmira smiled after seeing Tigre's gaze. Her mysterious smile suited her childish face; it did not give off her typical tension.

“Although the gate was made of hollowed out wood with three iron plates, and separated by oak boards

inside, you easily made a hole large enough to allow people to pass through.”

He was surely a rat cornered by the cat. He was unable to escape from the cat called Ludmira.

“At that time, I was in a rush. It was only after you left that I noticed it. After the gate was restored, I returned to my castle and examined it. It was something that could not be done simply by a Vanadis. The previous Vanadis, my mother, also fought with Eleanora's predecessor many times. There was more than enough material there. There were also the stories I heard from the soldiers.”

Tigre was not aware his knees were trembling.

Every word Ludmira spoke had a strong impact. Tigre could not help but feel an invisible rope tying around him.

In his mind, Ellen's angry face floated. She would hate it if she knew he had spoken about his bow to another person, much more so if that person was Ludmira.

“You wish to remain quiet? Did Eleanora forbid you from speaking about it?”

“Certainly, you did see the hole we made in your castle gate...”

Though he did not think it an excuse, Tigre desperately continued his resistance.

“That is about half the reason. I believe I have told you I am an aristocrat on the fringe of Brune, and I am somewhat proud of my archery skills.”

After drinking the remaining tea in his cup, Tigre responded in a poised demeanor and tone. He shrugged his shoulder as if it were a joke.

“Lord Tigrevurmud.”

Ludmira poured more tea into his cup as she smiled. Cold air was released from Lavias – the spear made of ice – beside her. It drifted past Tigre's ear.

It was different from the wind Ellen made with Arifal. It was of a threatening nature. If Tigre were a bit more sensitive, he may have noticed there was jealousy in the air since its master had become interested in a man.

Ludmira tilted her head cutely and continued smiling.

“I have believed in your sincerity before. I hope to believe your sincerity this time as well... Do you understand?”

It was clearly Tigre's defeat.

He called Rurick and had him bring his black bow.

“I am warning you, Lord Tigrevurmud. If you wish to borrow the strength of Olmutz, there is no point in lowering your head. If you wish to cooperate with them, you must throw your head back proudly.”

“If I ever do so, you're welcome to throw tea in my face.”

Rurick was baffled, not understanding the meaning of Tigre's words. Tigre received his black bow without saying another word.

He could understand Rurick's feelings. The confrontation between LeitMeritz and Olmutz was not one just between Ellen and Ludmira. It had existed with their predecessors as well.

Being in a situation where they needed to borrow power to break the status quo must have been irritating to a Knight of LeitMeritz like Rurick.

After thanking him for the bow, Tigre returned to the tent and showed his bow to Ludmira.

“A completely unrefined bow.”

That was the first opinion of the Vanadis with blue eyes and hair.

“This is a heirloom of my household. Please refrain from saying such things for my sake.”

Having said those words, thoughts of Tir na Fa crossed his mind. He wondered why his ancestors made this a heirloom.

Ignoring Tigre's words, Ludmira observed the black bow. She brought her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool close to it.

“Although it feels a little eerie... It seems to be a featureless bow.”

“I also thought that.”

That is, until fall, when he shot down the flying Dragon with the power of Ellen's Silver Flash.

Tigre carefully explained, one at a time, what happened when he used his bow. Ludmira listened with an eager expression, though at times she seemed anxious.

His guilt only grew heavier as he thought of Ellen, but it was too late now. He could do nothing but prepare himself.

Ludmira laughed, having guessed what Tigre was thinking from his expression.

“If Eleanora deserts you, I'll let you stay with me for a bit, though I doubt that will happen.”

“... Is that so?”

Tigre looked curiously at Ludmira. Certainly, Ellen would likely forgive him, but he did not think this Vanadis would say that.

“If I assume what you say to be true, then it is as if one more Vanadis exists. It would be possible to overwhelmingly dominate over the other six. I would

make sure to secure such a person before the other Vanadis. At least, if it were me.”

She spoke with frightening nonchalance. Tigre stared bitterly at his black bow.

However, he also had a sense of resignation, having seen the spectacle at the temple of Tir na Fa. He could not help but feel that way.

After clearing the mood, Tigre and Ludmira returned to the topic on hand.

“That is all I can offer. Will you help?”

“It is not enough. Leave Eleanora and come to me. If you do so, I will cooperate.”

“--- Do you intend to shoulder the debt I owe to Ellen as well?”

He tried to speak in a provocative manner, but Ludmira simply laughed in amusement.

“If that is all it would take, then certainly. I would have you pledge your loyalty to me.”

She calmly returned a response without hearing the amount he owed. Tigre's mouth remained slightly opened. Ludmira looked at him with amusement like a sister would look at her clumsy little brother.

“Whether you command one hundred soldiers or ten thousand, when you take command of a large army, you require a corresponding sense of sensibility. The same thing goes for power. If you wish to continue using your precious heirloom, make sure you think of its value at the time.”

--- *The value of this bow...*

Tigre understood immediately as he stared at his black bow. Ludmira taught him as if he were another Vanadis. It seems he had not yet understood it himself.

“I apologize. Please allow me to retract my previous statement.”

“Very well.”

Ludmira nodded and calmly rose from her chair.

“Regarding this matter, both wages and expenditures will be carried by you. Should you die, it will be considered a breach of contract. Do your best to live.”

--- *That's a pretty unreasonable demand given this battle.*

That thought floated through his head, though he agreed it would be best not to die. Though it would be difficult, he deemed it better compared to the other challenges he was facing.

“Let me say this again... thank you for your help.”

Tigre stood up and stretched his hand to Ludmira. Having shared a firm handshake, the two began speaking of battle immediately.

After the war council between the two had finished, Tigre left the tent.

Though he had not noticed it, they had spoken for a considerable amount of time. The sun had sunk beneath the cliff, and night was drifting heavily in the sky. Bonfires had been lit in both camps.

He felt excessively cold since he had just been in the warmth of the tent. He looked up at the white moon as it gradually shined argent.

Tigre walked from the tent and eventually released the tension in his shoulders. He sighed and felt pain in his stomach as he thought about what would happen when he next met Ellen.

However, he had completed the contract when he shook Ludmira's hand. There was nothing for him to do but to comfort himself.

When he reached the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] camp, Gerard ran up to him.

“How did it go?”

He did not bother with greetings. His expression showed he was very anxious.

“For now, we have their cooperation.”

Gerard let out a sigh of relief after hearing that. Afterward, he looked at Tigre as though he were a queer animal.

“Really, who on earth are you?”

“What do you mean... who am I?”

Gerard sighed in amazement seeing as Tigre did not understand his words.

“Even I know the Vanadis are an existence within Zhcted second only to the King. First Eleanora Viltaria, now the Vanadis with blue hair. What kind of power do you have to be able to obtain their cooperation?”

“It's a natural virtue.”

Tigre shrugged his shoulders impudently. Gerard looked at him as if it were simply a boring joke, but he knew it would be useless to pursue the matter any further. Instead, his face returned to its normal sarcastic expression.

“By the way, did anything happen while I was away?”

“Yes, that's right.”

Gerard nodded, as if waiting for Tigre to ask that question.

“It's about that girl you found before we fought with the Muozinel Army.”

“Ah, that girl. How is she? Did she look better?”

She was attacked by Muozinel and was dressed as a traveler. She had been resting for a few days due to severe fatigue.

However, because they had constantly moved camps as well as the fear that Muozinel would defeat the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] being constantly present, she could not rest well.

Though he was busy, Tigre had gone to see her once a day, but she was always asleep. Even now, her name was not known.

“Yes. It happened a while ago, but I would like to ask. What kind of situation was it when you helped the girl? She is quite wary of us and seems unusually afraid...”

“Afraid?”

“Currently one soup bowl is damaged and my finger and index finger are burnt.”

Tigre tilted his head in thought.

“I'd rather hope not, but the soldiers may have done something. Did that have anything to do with it?”

He did not want to think of it, but the army is a group of men, and they had strained themselves constantly over the past few days. If even a single person causes a problem, it would not be amusing.

Thankfully, Gerard shook his head.

“The person nursing her is trustworthy. Furthermore, the soldiers are kind and occasionally approach to see how she is doing, but she does nothing then. There is no possibility of that.”

If he saw her, Tigre may come to understand something. Tigre began to walk with Gerard one step behind.

First, Tigre visited the supply line to gather some wine, cheese, bread, and fruit into a small basket.

“Do we have any soup?”

“There is some that has cooled down. We can warm it at the bonfire.”

“I'm sorry for asking so much of you in a situation like this.”

“Well, it's fine. We can be a bit generous since we gathered some food from the Muozinel Army.”

Tigre thanked the soldier in charge of cooking and requested Gerard bring soup for two later on.

“For the time being, allow me to meet the girl alone.”

“Thank you for your consideration. In all aspects, she looks like a traveler. Though she does not speak, it is always good to be able to have a bowl of soup. Still, even if we obtained supplies from the Muozinel Army, every grain is important on the battlefield.”

After Gerard spoke those words with a straight face and shrugged his shoulders, Tigre entered the tent with his basket full of food alone.

One soldier standing in front of the tent in the cold allowed Tigre entry after seeing his face. He seemed impatient, so he was likely the soldier who nursed her.

“How does the girl look? Can she get up?”

“Yes. She seems quite cautious of us, so I am standing outside so as to not agitate her.”

The man was in his mid 40s. His belly shook as he laughed.

“Don't worry about it. Since I will be with her, take a short rest.”

After telling him the supply line had warmed a bowl of soup for him, the soldier walked away happily. Tigre passed through the entrance after seeing him off.

The girl with golden hair sat upright. Although her face stiffened for a moment and she glared at Tigre, her expression loosened upon seeing him.

--- I wonder if she remembers when we helped her.

Under the bright lamp, only he and the girl sat. There were bags packed with medical herbs and tubs with water and towels in them.

The girl slept on straw covered with fur under a thick blanket. Though it was not particularly good, it was better than to be expected on the battlefield.

“I've brought some food. Do you want to eat?”

The girl nodded deeply after seeing him ask with a smile.

Tigre walked near her while watching and sat down. He took out a pomegranate, divided it in two, and handed it to the girl. She received it and looked at it curiously.

--- Is she not going to bite into it?

“You can bite into it. The red things inside are seeds, and its juices will fly out, so be careful.”

After receiving an explanation, she bit into it, carrying it to her mouth timidly. She frowned from the acidity but continued nibbling it like a small animal.

Though there was still fatigue on her face, she seemed to have recovered considerably compared to when they first met. Even though dim, there was a fire of life in her azure eyes.

“There's bread and cheese, too. I also have some wine, but don't work too hard. Eat it little by little.”

After pushing the basket before the girl, she nodded quietly and continued gnawing at the pomegranate. Tigre tilted his head while comparing this straightforward reaction to Gerard's story.

--- I thought so before as well, but where have I seen this girl?

No matter how desperately he searched his memory, no clear image appeared.

“May I have your name?”

Although it was an innocent question, the girl stopped eating the pomegranate and stared at Tigre with her blue eyes. After a while, she responded in a dazzlingly small voice.

“Re... Regin.”

“Regin, is it? It's surprisingly suitable. Nice to meet you.”

“--- Tigrevurmud Vorn.”

Regin said it before he spoke his name. Having heard it, Tigre nodded with admiration.

“That's right. It's a bit long, so Tigre is fine.”

“... Tigre.”

Her reactions still seemed slow. After moving her mouth a few times, Regin finally spoke Tigre's name. Tigre felt her physical condition must not have been back to normal.

“Thank you, Tigre.”

Regin lowered her head, her disordered hair shaking in the process. Tigre was relieved he could have a proper conversation and smiled at her.

“At the very least, while I am here, I will try and defend you, so please try and relax.”

After nodding again, Regin began nibbling the pomegranate again. She did not ask questions or let Tigre out of sight. While her facial expressions were not particularly vast, her eyes looked innocently at him like a child relying on her mother, which confused Tigre.

--- Certainly, I did help this girl...

But is that enough to become so emotionally attached? There were small scratches and cuts on Tigre's face and arms, and he was covered in grime and dirt. Blood was stuck to his clothes; he seemed no different from the other soldiers. He decided to ask other questions instead of worrying about it, though.

"Regin. Where did you come from? Are you from this area?"

"... I came from far away."

Though she did not lie, it was clear she had carefully chosen her words given her facial expression.

"So why did you come here from such a long distance?"

Regin fell silent. Tigre waited calmly; eventually, he shook his head apologetically.

“No. If you do not wish to speak about it, then it is not necessary. You have your circumstances.”

When he spoke words of comfort, Regin looked upward at Tigre.

“You. Why are you here?”

Tigre understood she was wondering why his military forces were in Agnes. He spoke as if to explain it to a small child.

“Muozinel – the country to the southeast, has led its army here. We have come to drive them back.”

“Are you not the lord of Alsace?”

A moment of silence ran between the two. Regin's slip of the tongue surprised Tigre for a moment.

Though he considered cross examining her regarding how she knew this, he did not think she would obediently respond. She seemed like the type to be unnecessarily stubborn.

“.... Have we met before? Perhaps you traveled to Alsace before.”

With some effort, Tigre smiled and spoke to Regin. Regin looked at him with wide eyes before smiling.

“We met elsewhere. Even then, you were gentle.”

It seems they had met, but Tigre could not recall.

“Earl Vorn. I have brought the soup.”

Gerard's voice was heard from outside. Tigre stood up as he tried to smile at Regin.

“Is there anything else you want? I can't say we have much, though.”

When asked, Regin hesitated for a time before shyly speaking.

“Then... Some a pail with hot water, and a towel, please.”

Thinking she wanted to wipe her body, Tigre consented. Though calm, she was a girl, so he could understand her feelings. When he put his face and hands outside the tent to grab the two bowls of soup from Gerard, who spoke with a straight face.

“How is it? Did she bite or scratch you?”

“I was worried when I went in, but she's as calm as a dog one's kept for years. Were you suddenly asking her personal questions?”

Tigre showed a nasty smile. Gerard simply tilted his neck curiously.

“Though I can't really say for sure, perhaps it really is your talent.”

“Talent?”

“A talent of debauchery in which beautiful women flock to you. Though it is a valuable natural virtue, please avoid causing trouble. It is not unusual for a hero to fall to ruins because of a woman.”

“... Our visitor wants a pail, a towel, and some hot water. Please get it.”

Tigre countered the man with brown hair who had turned away. Gerard shook his right hand with his back turned, showing his understanding. Tigre returned to Regin and placed the bowl of soup before her.

“Careful, it's hot.”

As he said so, he sipped his soup. Thankfully, though there were few ingredients, it was made better in this cold weather. The vegetables and meat melted into the soup, and the flavor was enhanced by the fat. The salty taste spread a moderate heat throughout the body.

As he was about to take his second spoon, Tigre noticed Regin was gazing at his soup.

“What's wrong?”

“May I have that soup?”

She asked in a small but clear voice, completely confusing Tigre.

He thought there may have been some problems with her soup, but Regin had not even picked it up in the first place.

“Even though I've already had some to drink?”

Regin nodded without a care. Though reluctant, Tigre exchanged bowls with her. Regin drank her soup without hesitation.

“Warm...”

As if condensing her loveliness, Regin smiled shyly and let out a satisfied sigh. She quickly worked her spoon, finishing her soup before Tigre.

“I wonder how many years its been since I had anything this warm.”

--- *Years!?*

Tigre almost dropped his spoon. He thought through this girl's strange speech and behavior.

The soup was not special. It was simply pork, potato, onions, and salt thrown into a pan of boiling water. It

was an ordinary ration for the army and a popular meal for the common people.

--- Was she that poor? No, it's something different...

Even if her voice was small, she was very polite. Oblivious to Tigre's astonishment, Regin continued smiling at him.

“Thank you. I remembered the old times.”

Tigre was forced to respond with a smile. The two ate bread and cheese without talking, then they drunk some wine.

Tigre did not know what to ask her, though he had looked at Regin's azure eyes several times. The two finished eating their meal with satisfied expressions.

“I have brought the hot water.”

A blunt voice was heard from outside. It was Gerard.

Tigre showed his hands and face outside the tent and took the towel and pail. Having been forced to carry the items twice, he seemed dissatisfied.

“Any progress?”

Tigre shook his head. Shocked by her words and attitude, he had not made any progress.

“Please tell her to remain obedient, at least.”

After expressing his understanding to Gerard, Tigre placed the wooden tub and towel before Regin. When he was about to leave, she called out to Tigre.

“Um...”

Though hesitant, after taking a deep breath, Regin looked up at Tigre as if she had made a decision.

“Thank you for everything you've done, but could you help wipe my body?”

“... What?”

Tigre thought he misheard for a moment, but Regin's face was colored with shame. She repeated her words in a voice smaller than before.

“Um... I am not asking you to wipe my entire body. Just the places I cannot reach. For example... My back.”

“Surely there is someone else...”

He had started to say that, but Tigre realized the current [Silver Meteor Army] ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} was a large group of men with the current purpose of fighting the Muozinel Army.

It would take them several days of marching to reach Territoire from Agnes, and he had made Teita stay behind. With the cliffs and stones, she would easily be injured. Tigre wanted to avoid that as much as possible.

It is possible he could take her to Ludmira's Army, but to have to go there for such a trivial thing was frightening.

--- That's right, there are two thousand men and women who lived in Agnes...

When that idea finally arrived in his head, Regin spoke with a surprisingly strong tone.

“If, if it is not you... I cannot do it.”

She blushed further, but her eyes were filled with a strong emotion as she looked up at Tigre.

“Why me?”

Regin would not answer, even if he asked. Tigre had another thought in the corner of his mind.

--- This girl does not seem that shy at all...

She knew Tigre, which is why she asked, despite her embarrassment. Perhaps she did not trust the soup until she saw Tigre drink it.

Before long, Tigre sighed and turned his back on her.

“Take your clothes off. When your back is turned, call me.”

I’m sorry, a small voice was heard from behind Tigre.

He could hear the sounds of her clothes rustling. Tigre could not contain the stress of being in a situation where a beautiful girl near his age was taking off her clothes behind his back. The surroundings were very quiet, making all other sounds seem louder.

“Please...”

Her trembling voice full of shyness called out to him. Tigre turned about.

Illuminated by the light of the lamp, her white back which lacked flesh was present. He had the same impression when he lifted her in his arms; she had a delicate physique. Both her shoulders and hips were small.

He involuntarily let out a breath upon seeing her beauty. Regin, hearing the sound, turned red and tensed her muscles. She cowered slightly. Tigre carefully walked up to her and sat down.

Lately, he had seen nude females up close several times. No matter how many times he looked, he still could not remain calm. Ellen's nude body crossed his mind; Tigre shook it off in a panic.

--- No strange thoughts. Concentrate on Regin for now.

「あなたでないと、いやです」



Even so, he wanted her to cover below her waist at least, but it would be embarrassing for both of them if he pointed that out, so he took care not to see as much as possible.

Wringing the hot water out of the towel, he brought the towel to her shoulder. Regin's body trembled strongly, but she weakly told him to continue.

Without using excessive force, Tigre carefully rubbed Regin's back so as to remove all the dirt.

Though Tigre had a strange face, he considered it to be trivial. His face was hot, and a strange amount of tension was present in his muscles near his nose. It was a face he did not want to see at all.

His heart raged, feeling the softness of her skin through the towel. He struggled hard with his reason to force his excitement down. Though Tigre grasped his left hand and endured the impulse desperately, he made a mistake and a painful sigh leaked from Regin's mouth.

Tigre stopped what he was doing and turned his face away for a count of five. He needed to build up the energy to force down his desire. He had already given up

and let his lower body have an excessive reaction, but it would go down to normal once he went out in the cold.

At the end of all his suffering, Tigre had managed to finish wiping Regin's back.

“... Something like this.”

It was a man's honor to say something like this.

“Um... Just a little lower, please.”

It really was only a moment of vanity. Regin's words showed that Tigre had been trying not to look at her waist as much as possible.

While his self control still remained, Tigre moved his left hand. Despite Regin letting out two soft moans, he had managed to complete his work.

Though her back was thin, it still had a female-specific elasticity, and her waist only felt softer to Tigre's left hand.

“... Can you do the rest yourself?”

Tigre hung the towel on a wooden hook as he turned his back to her. Fatigue weighed his entire body; he wanted to escape to cool his body as soon as possible

“Yes. Thank you very much.”

Hearing her words of gratitude, Tigre was wrapped in a sense of relief. He was finally done.

As he was trying to exit the tent, Regin's voice called out to him once again.

“I'm sorry.”

Though Tigre was about to look back on reflex, he panicked after seeing her look over her shoulder and quickly left. He realized he had left the basket behind, but decided to leave it.

--- *What does she mean...?*

He thought about the words Regin had said as he left. It was not an apology for having him wipe her body, but he was not sure of the reason why.

--- *Well, it's fine. She'll tell me eventually.*

Tigre concluded quickly. There were too many things to think about. His contract with Ludmira, the forty thousand strong Muozinel Army, he did not have the time.

Before he searches for a new problem, it's necessary to solve the ones before him.

Ellen and Lim were given a room in the Legnica imperial palace. After speaking with Sasha and finishing their meal, they went to sleep early.

The two woke before dawn and went to the building at the edge of the palace, telling their men to wake up. They also checked the numbers present.

Lim received the report.

“The people who have reached the temple by last night is approximately thirteen hundred.”

“So we still don't have everyone...”

While preparing their armor, Ellen wore a difficult face. According to Sasha's story, Elizavetta commanded an army of about four thousand.

“Sasha said she would lend us three thousand soldiers.
..”

Ellen had hoped for more soldiers so she could settle the matter quickly.

“If you include the people who arrived at midnight, it comes to approximately seventeen hundred.”

“They need rest or they will simply die on the battlefield. If we need them, they can be used as scouts.”

“Certainly. We will do that.”

As Lim responded with a smile, a knock came from the door. Opening the door, the old servant and three senior aids stood before them.

“Is something wrong?”

When Lim asked with her expressionless face, the servants, without destroying the solemn atmosphere, bowed.

“We apologize, but there are many who work here who wish to see Limlisha-sama by all means. I understand you are busy, but could you spare us some time?”

Lim was baffled by the servant's words. It was not the first time she had visited the palace. She had visited numerous times before alongside Ellen.

In any case, as she had come with Ellen to help numerous times, the unit Commander and grand chamberlain had begged her to teach them affairs pertaining to the military and the state. As such, Lim had many acquaintances.

--- But why would they contact me in such a situation?

Surely they understood she was busy helping with the situation in Legnica in place of Sasha who was ill of health.

“Lim. Go.”

Ellen pushed Lim's back with a dubious face and a bright voice.

“This is Sasha's imperial palace. I don't know what kind of business they have, but it shouldn't be a problem for us to deal with. Still, we're busy, so keep it brief.”

There was no shadow on Ellen's face at all; her bright eyes were shining. She had faith in Lim. Understanding that, Lim turned back to the servants.

“Then please guide me.”

Lim was guided away from the guest room by the servants and walked down the corridor lined with torches. She noticed she had turned a corner several times.

--- This is the place we were at yesterday.

Her expectations soon became reality. Lim was guided before Sasha's room.

“... Isn't this Alexandra-sama's room?”

“Correct.”

The servant confirmed Lim's words with a brief response. He opened the door and urged her in.

"I apologize for having you come all this way."

It was definitely the room she had visited yesterday. Like before, Sasha sat up as soon as she saw her guest. Lim stepped inside, bowed, and stood before her.

"Alexandra-sama. What business might you have with me?"

Since she was called alone, she must not have wanted Ellen to hear her words.

--- Though Eleanora-sama may have guessed this would happen.

Sasha nodded and looked up at Lim with a serious expression.

"Please, protect Ellen for me."

Lim looked at the black haired Vanadis in surprise. Such a thing was unnecessary to say. Before Ellen had become a Vanadis, Lim had stood beside her and defended her. Sasha knew that as well.

Though Lim did not show her feelings, Sasha seemed to have read them and quietly continued.

“I know there is no need to tell you, but even so, I wished to say it. Her opponent is Elizavetta.”

Ellen and Elizavetta had a connection.

Autumn one year ago, in a certain village in Zhcted Kingdom, an epidemic broke out. Although the village was under the direct control of the royal family, it was adjacent to Lebus which Elizavetta governed.

To prevent the epidemic from expanding, she burned the village and every person who likely had the illness. She took a stance of isolation while Ellen offered to look after those quarantined.

“Before I became a Vanadis, I lived in that village for a period of time. I also wished to help them, but I could not. I ended up causing you trouble.”

However, Elizavetta ignored Ellen's request.

“I understand that this village is under control of the royal family. However, there is no need for two Vanadis

to intervene; there is still an epidemic here. It would not concern me if not for the possibility that the damage would reach Lebus. Even if this does not involve me, as a Vanadis, that matter has nothing to do with you.”

There was no mistake in Elizavetta's words which lacked any flexibility. Still, Ellen could do nothing but withdraw.

However, the majority of the isolated people were unable to last through the winter.

Many families and acquaintances were lost, and the village where she was born and grew up in was tossed aside. Though it was possible to escape from the epidemic, they had been dealt a severe mental and physical blow from the outside world. There were many disputes over what should be done amongst the villagers

.

When spring arrived, the number of people had decreased by more than half. They gave up on rejuvenating the village and scattered. Though there were some who were able to accept living in other villages, many turned to thievery. They would have been unable to live otherwise.

Ellen blamed Elizavetta for this. Her proposal was refused, resulting in this unavoidable occurrence. Ellen's thoughts ended at that resentment, and she could not consider Elizavetta's feelings. Though she was hurt as a result of this, so was Elizavetta.

Elizavetta was not necessarily crossing her arms and letting things be. Despite not being her territory, she brought food and materials to them throughout the winter, arranged for more doctors, and offered to help with reconstructing the village.

An invisible crack which ran deep formed between Ellen and Elizavetta because of this affair.

At that time, an aristocrat named Rojion near the LeitMerit began to cause problems.

He pocketed a certain amount of the taxes he collected and falsified his reports to the Kingdom. Furthermore, when his territory had become penniless, he attacked the neighboring territories.

The aristocrats who suffered appealed to the King. He ordered a Vanadis, Sophie, to investigate the matter regarding Rojion, who found proof after several days.

Though the King ordered Ellen to subjugate his territory, the one who appeared was Elizavetta.

“Rojion is my father. I will persuade him. He will receive an appropriate punishment to atone for his crimes.”

“--- Now that you have become a Vanadis, whether he is your father or not has no relation.”

Though Ellen spoke sarcastically, Elizavetta pulled back.

However, instead of responding to the negotiations with Zhcted, Rojion escaped. Ellen led her army to chase after him, which led to his death.

Rojion had caused a problem though; Ellen was given orders by the King, and she had done what was needed to be done. Though Elizavetta understood that, she could not suppress the intense emotions within her.

At that point, Elizavetta challenged Ellen and was defeated.

“Regarding those two events, you cannot say either was right or wrong. They simply did what needed to be done.”

“Alexandra-sama, I thought you would side with Eleanora-sama.”

Needless to say, Lim herself was Ellen's ally, and she had also stayed in that village. Like the silver-white haired girl, she also blamed Elizavetta.

“Even if I believed Ellen wasn't correct, I would remain her ally. Unfortunately, as I am now, that is difficult.”

Sasha placed her hand on her chest with a sad smile. She then looked up at Lim with a serious expression.

“Only a Vanadis can stop a Vanadis. However, I believe Ellen will head straight for Elizavetta. Though her intense feelings can be good, they may dull her movements.”

Lim nodded. Though there was deep discord running between Ellen and Elizavetta, she had two reasons for her to be angry.

The first would be the attack on Sasha's territory, the land of her best friend.

The other reason was because she had left Brune to help Sasha – she had been forced to part from Tigre.

It was while Lim was deciding whether to mention this.

“There is also the issue with Tigrevurmud Vorn.”

Sasha continued quietly after seeing Lim's suspicious face.

“From your stories, I can understand Ellen cherishes him. Whether it is friendship or love, I cannot tell... Even so, he is a man from another country whom she had met on the battlefield just a few months ago.”

“I can understand your thoughts, Alexandra-sama. When he was a captive in LeitMeritz, I too felt he should not have been left alive.”

It was different now. She had served as his assistant and exchanged words. She had continued watching his actions. Those who met the man named Tigre were charmed.

However, Lim continued speaking with conviction.

“However, Lord Tigrevurmud has shown to be of a suitable caliber to earn Eleanora-sama's trust. He has continued to show it, even within such a short span of time.”

When Lim closed her mouth, silence filled the room. But Sasha's expression of regret from not being able to do anything did not disappear.

“Is Ellen okay? Is there a need for her to rush herself?”

“That...”

Lim could not answer Sasha's question in an instant. Even if they had retreated from Nemetacum which Thenardier governed, they had traveled several days after repulsing both Marquis Greast and the Knights of Navarre in succession. Anything could happen.

At this time, neither Lim nor Ellen knew of the invasion by the Muozinel Army; however, they had considered the possibility of an invasion from another country. Thinking of that, they wished to return as quickly as possible.

“One year ago, Ellen defeated her. However, if she has both anger and impatience, I cannot say what the result will be. That is why I wished to speak to you who has remained by her side since she was a mercenary.”

Please protect Ellen.

Sasha said it once again as she bowed before Lim.

“I will protect her to the best of my ability, even if it means using my body.”

Though she said that, she would do her best to prevent it. She recalled the time when she was poisoned by an assassin. Ellen would grieve if she died, so she wanted to avoid it at all possible costs.

“This is farewell for now.”

As if she were waiting for Lim to return, Ellen went to visit Sasha.

“Though I told you before, I have a guy I need to help. Once I knock Elizavetta to the ground, I’ll be heading there.”

Behind Ellen, Lim remained expressionless, acting as if the two had not met a moment ago. Sasha grasped the hand Ellen presented to her.

“Ellen, I have a request.”

When Ellen looked curious with her friend's hand between hers, Sasha spoke quietly.

“If you are hesitating, do not stick around for Legnica or me. I want you to give priority to what you must. I am glad that you even took the time to come here.”

Ellen thought of Tigre and laughed energetically.

“You just rest and wait for the good news. I’ll definitely beat Elizavetta.”

Almost exactly at dawn, against the white sunlight illuminating the eastern sky, Ellen and Lim led four thousand troops and left the imperial palace. The sky was dark, their breath was white, and the air was still cold.

Thankfully, as it was not snowing, they could easily advance without removing the snow, except near the grounds of Vasaro.

“Lim, our fight will be at Vasaro.”

Ellen spoke sternly to the adjutant next to her.

“I'll take two thousand of the troops Sasha lent and those from LeitMeritz to attack from the front. You hit Elizavetta from the side or the rear.”

“Eleanora-sama...”

Lim shook her head and raised her voice. She had just promised to defend Ellen, yet it would be impossible if she were not nearby.

Ellen looked curiously, seeing Lim show signs of anger

.

“Is it strange? The river flowing near Vasaro is frozen, and there are hills and plains in the vicinity. Sasha's soldiers have high morale as well.”

Looking over their shoulder, the soldiers of Legnica had a will to fight as they advanced which could not be hidden. It was not unusual.

Their land was attacked, and their Lord was sickly. It was clear they intended to entirely crush Lebus. The power of their silent cry was clear to hear.

“They're looking for a fight, so leave Elizavetta to me. You take charge of the flying column. It's a reasonable plan.”

Lim could not find any words to say. Attacking from the flank while the enemy was preoccupied with a fight at the front was the correct plan.

Lim wavered yet again, but her Lord's gaze would not permit anymore time. She spoke hesitantly.

“Eleanora-sama... you are both angry and impatient.”

Sasha spoke of her worries while looking down, though Lim was reluctant to say that out of consideration

of the woman who asked her this favor. Despite her surprise, Ellen smiled gently at once.

“Certainly I am angry, as are the soldiers behind us, and I am worried about Tigre. But my mind is not clouded, nor are my movements dull.”

Lim still did not think it permissible to leave Ellen out of her sights. Ellen reluctantly asked her a question.

“Then what should I do?”

“Devote your troops to defense until I make the surprise attack. Though I cannot say this too loudly... there is meaning in remaining in position; it is so that Alexandra-sama's forces do not act recklessly.

Soldiers with a high morale disregard their Commander's instructions and go mad with rage. There are numerous examples of a calm enemy striking such forces down.”

“You're being paranoid, Lim.”

Ellen laughed with her ruby pupils glittering, seeing Lim worry so much.

“However, you have a point. We'll do it this way so you don't have to worry so much. However---”

Her joking smile became serious.

“Can you hurry up? It would be troublesome if they noticed our detached forces.”

Originally, Ellen would take the offensive so Elizavetta would not realize it, which is why Ellen took lead of both troops from LeitMeritz and Legnica.

“I shall do my best. You must take care as well, Eleanora-sama.”

Lim spoke these words as best she could.

The snow gradually became deep, and the sky looked suspicious as powdery snow danced to the ground.

They arrived at Vasaro before midday the following day.

A girl was lying down, entrusting her back to the mane of her horse.

In one hand was a black short whip used for horses. While holding it in the air, she watched as the snow melted and disappeared. Though the horse was well accustomed to the rider, she had an excellent sense of balance.

The sun approached its peak; the sky was covered in a veil of snow clouds.

Suddenly, she shut her left eye and looked at the sky with her golden right eye. Then she closed her other eye and looked up with her azure left eye.

It was something of a habit to look at things with a single eye.

--- Even if the color of my pupils are different, the scenery doesn't change.

She had been doing this since a young age, yet she still held an expectation in the back of her mind that something would change.

^{Laziris}
[Rainbow Eyes]. This girl – Elizavetta Fomina – had eyes of different colors.

That is what she was called in Zhcted, but the interpretation of her alias was different from region to region. In the land she was born in, she was considered evil, but those of Lebus, the people of the land she governed, considered it to be a good omen.

Elizavetta was 17 years old. She had vivid red hair down to her waist and wore purple clothing; her dress was full of lace and ruffles. Her well-developed bosom and thin waist were emphasized, making her appear flashy but never vulgar.

However, her peculiar eyes were always looked at first . Even her bright red hair and gorgeous dress paled in comparison to her pupils.

The sound of horseshoes approached, calling for Elizavetta to return. She sat up and saw a Knight, her aid, approach.

He was in his mid-thirties and had served as a Knight in Lebus before Elizavetta became a Vanadis. His face looked young without a beard, but fatigue was clearly carved into it.

“Vanadis-sama. Our scouts say a force three thousand strong is approaching from the south.”

“Their colors?”

Elizavetta played with her bright red hair. As if expecting the question, the Knight responded promptly.

“There are two. One with blades of vermillion and gold crossing diagonally on a yellow background, and one with a sword of silver on a black background.”

The moment she heard the report, both ends of Elizavetta's charming lips raised in a violent smile. The first was Sasha's, but that did not matter. Only the second flag was important.

--- You came, Ellen...!

“You've worked hard. Tell the troops to retreat when they see the Vanadis. I will fight her on my own.”

“But... there are two armies, and there is the possibility Alexandra-sama will appear, despite her poor health.”

“A pointless worry. Even if Alexandra wished to join, Eleanora would not allow it.”

The Vanadis with bright red hair made that declaration. After dismounting her horse, she picked up the saddle at her feet and brushed the snow off it.

Vasaro was surrounded by endless plains with gently rolling hills and valleys. It was covered in snow. Though not deep, the ground was only exposed when walking through it. There was no wind, but that was a welcome for her four thousand troops.

“You've worked hard from the pirate subjugation until now.”

As she put the saddle on her horse, Elizavetta gave words of appreciation to her soldiers. The men present simply shook their head.

“We know, that in the three years since you have become a Vanadis, you have devoted your strength to the people of Lebus.”

There was no need to thank them. Elizavetta mounted her horse. Due to a variety of modifications in her dress, she could ride her horse with a skirt on without riding side-saddle.

With two horses at the front, the troops proceeded toward their stronghold.

The afternoon when Ellen lead the Legnica and LeitMeritz allied forces to confront Elizavetta and the Lebus Army she commanded.

Both armies totaled seven thousand in number. The men behind each Vanadis looked at each other with intense gazes.

“You're quite well prepared...”

Ellen said that before the battle.

“You knew we were coming? Looks like you didn't use the chance to escape, Liza.”

“That is a matter of course, since I wished to meet you, Ellen.”

Elizavetta parried Ellen's words with a gentle smile and a sharp voice fraught with animosity. Though she spoke with a foolish tone, the words themselves were not a lie. If not, she would have simply stood up and left.

“... I have no memory of allowing you to call me in such a manner.”

Ellen's cold voice which could freeze even the snow lowered even more.

“Nor do I recall allowing you to call me Liza.”

Elizavetta responded happily while flourishing the short whip in her hand.

--- *Forgive me, Lim.*

Ellen decided to ride the red haired Vanadis' provocations. After apologizing to Lim in her mind, she decided to further hide the presence of the detached forces. The Legnica soldiers would soon be unable to hold back any longer.

Arifal let off a light wind as Ellen placed a hand on the longsword at her waist, as if to encourage her.

“I will give you one chance. Get off your horse, crawl on the ground, and apologize. Not to me, but to the people of Legnica.”

“I refuse.”

“Then you will die.”

Pulling out the longsword at her waist, she swung it downward and pointed its tip to the red haired Vanadis.

“Charge!”

A battle cry was let loose from seven thousand soldiers , extending across the gray sky. The land shook, and the snow was kicked about and melted from the heat of the men.

In this frontal clash, Elizavetta had the advantage of numbers.

However, the fighting spirit of the soldiers of Legnica was overwhelming. They put their grudge of having their lands attacked into their weapons and threw it at the enemy before them.

The soldiers of Lebus huddled together and brought their shields forward. They fought back desperately, piercing through the spaces between their shields with spears. Immediately after, they were bathed in heat and blood, which shined brightly in the snow.

Arrows flew by, letting out an ominous sound of piercing the flesh. They wielded their battle axes, using their anger to cleave through the enemy's helmets. They thrust their swords forward, scooping out the entrails.

It was a scene from hell, wrapped in the agonized cries of pandemonium. It was impossible to think this was once a fantastic landscape covered in snow and silence.

Leading the attack, Ellen and Elizavetta met.

^{Ley Admos}
“Cleave the Wind!”

While her horse cut the distance, Ellen released her ^{Veda} Dragonic Skill without hesitation. A large wind was released from the longsword, blowing all snow aside as it cut across the frozen earth toward Elizavetta.

Elizavetta sacrificed her horse without hesitation and kicked off the saddle as her horse moved toward the

invisible wave. The wind was suddenly filled with blood. The horse's bones shattered, its flesh torn to shreds.

Casually spreading the hem of her dress while in the sky, Elizavetta pulled out a short whip.

In that moment, her black whip tinged with a golden light and wriggled about like a snake playing in the air. When Elizavetta swung it downward toward Ellen, it had become a forty chet (approximately four meters) whip covered in lightning.

Ellen knew it had an abnormal destructive power. It was a spectacle worthy of the [Rainbow Eyes]^{Laziris} Elizavetta, the [Flash Princess of the Thunder Swirl]^{Isgriifa}.

It was impossible to deflect it with the wind. Ellen threw her horse aside and jumped to the ground, rolling away as a whip tore through the atmosphere, nearly at the speed of sound.

When she stood up, what came into view was her horse's corpse with its head missing.

“It will hurt if you resist too much, right, Ellen?”

Elizavetta lightly landed on the snow and hit the ground with her whip. As if answering her, the whip discharged innumerable blue sparks into the atmosphere.

“I also won't hold back, Thunder Swirl.”

That was yet another name held by Elizavetta.

Thunder Swirl Valitsaif, the whip of lightning known as the [Lightning Flash of Broken Calamity].

“I will return those words right back at you.”

While Ellen retorted boldly, a Legnica soldier let out a shout and attacked Elizavetta from behind. She was the enemy's General and her focus was on Ellen, so her back was defenseless.

However, the spear did not reach Elizavetta.
[Rainbow Eyes]^{Laziris} simply rolled her wrists lightly.

The whip of lightning bounced across the ground. Its tip destroyed the spear handle and wrapped around the soldier's wrist, throwing him into the air.

It was a ghastly sight in the snowy field smeared with blood and dirt. Lightning was emitted from the whip and shot toward the soldier. A thin film of atmosphere was split by many layers of heat and light far surpassing human tolerance, burning the soldier without mercy.

His pain was instantaneous, because his death occurred in a single moment.

Without looking at the soldier who fell behind her, Elizavetta carefully measured the distance between her and Ellen. On the other hand, Ellen kicked off the ground, casually shortening the distance.

“--- Shadow ^{Verni}Wind, is it?”

The wind clung to Ellen's body, her silver-white hair fluttering as she moved. Ellen ran at a furious speed despite the snow. Elizavetta's smile disappeared as her eyes of different colors moved quickly about the battlefield. She moved her whip, but it did not hit Ellen.



It was difficult to say she read the orbit of the whip. Ellen's movements were rough and quite obvious, but she evaded the lightning with her overwhelming speed.

“Using such sloppy movements... Iron Whip!”

^{Kusutari}

Clenching her teeth, Elizavetta's lightning quickly changed. The mass of snake-like lightning decreased by half its length and transformed into a straight rod.

There was a violent clash immediately afterward. A storm of silver-white and gold raged. Particles of ice were whipped about by the wind, evaporated by the heat of thunder in an instant. The snow vanished from their surroundings, the earth was torn away as an aftereffect.

She did not try to fight Ellen through power, but attacked furiously like a storm from various angles. She cut upward, downward, swiped from the side, continuing to attack without blinking an eye.

If she showed any opening, the thunder at Elizavetta's fingertips would turn to fangs. Ellen had been forced to drive her into a state where it was difficult to release her thunder.

At a moment of impact, Ellen's body was blown away by a terrific attack of lightning.

She straightened her posture in the air in an instant and safely landed, grasping her sword with both hands.

--- *What was that just now?*

She needed more time to understand the attack from the whip of steel. After they clashed, she was bathed in lightning. A red scar ran up Ellen's arm as she was burned by the attack.

Her frilly skirt changed. The thunder once again took the form of a whip as Elizavetta kicked off the ground. Ellen tried to approach the woman, but changed her mind immediately.

Elizavetta's whip moved in an eccentric trajectory which split the earth and divided the wind. Ellen gave up reading its orbit at once.

With just a flick of her wrist, the Vanadis with bright red hair could greatly change the motions of her whip. With attacks coming from every blind spot, Ellen could not read it at all.

She quickly parried Elizavetta's heavy and vigorous attacks.

She could not even approach. The sound of the whip splitting the air pressured Ellen's eyes and ears.

Catching a blow with her sword, Ellen's body softly drifted back through the air, her posture maintained. She landed several steps back. Having been blown back by Elizavetta's whip, the wind put the appropriate distance between them.

Ellen and Elizavetta were sweating and breathless, but while Elizavetta had room to relax, Ellen's face showed a sense of crisis.

If she received a single hit directly, the onslaught would not end. Even if she could endure it, Ellen's attack would only be hit with a barrage of more blows.

--- Arifal's wind can't perfectly defend against her lightning strikes.

The shock would make her body numb; she would be unable to move and would inevitably be defeated.

“Where was that strength you had a moment ago?
Your counteroffensive is rather boring.”

“I was simply amazed since your attacks are so coarse.
”

The [Wind Princess of the ^{Silvfrau}Silver Flash] sarcastically
retorted to the [Flash Princess of the ^{Isgrifa}Thunder Swirl]. The
numbness in Ellen's hand was getting worse as time
passed. She jumped back despite the risks because of that
.

“Incidentally, I have not asked you yet.”

Hearing Ellen's words, Elizavetta stopped walking. At
this time, the two were a considerable distance away
from the battlefield.

“Who asked you to play this hand? Thenardier?
Ganelon?”

“... What do you mean?”

Elizavetta's attempt to deceive her failed. Her voice
was distracted and delayed.

“Legnica was probably attacked to force me to return to Zhcted.”

“I do not understand your words... I follow His Majesty the King. I move only for the national interests of Zhcted.”

Smiling bitterly, Elizavetta shrugged her shoulder, seemingly continuing to feign ignorance. While doing so, she did not loosen her vigilance toward Ellen. If she relaxed for even a moment, the wind from the Vanadis with silver-white hair would cut her immediately.

“Moving at the beck and call of a villain from a foreign country is in the best interests for Zhcted? Don't make me laugh.”

“I do not wish to hear that from you. Rumors say you have put quite a bit of effort into helping your prisoner. I should say those very words to you.”

Elizavetta spoke sarcastically, her hand held up to her mouth. Ellen simply laughed it off.

“Though it's hardly an excuse... Hearing those words from a person who knows nothing is rather pitiable.”

Before Elizavetta could respond, Ellen changed the subject once again.

“There's one more thing I would like to ask.”

Ellen pointed her blade toward Elizavetta once again.

“... What did you do to obtain that strength you have now?”

She had dealt Ellen an intense blow. In their duel the year before, she did not have such a herculean strength.

“Nowhere in particular... It is a result of desperate training.”

Ellen smiled with derision towards Elizavetta's natural smile.

“I've been swinging my sword since the age of 6. Do you really think you can fool me with that nonsense?”

“... I know.”

She spoke in a quiet tone, different from her usual manner. Her eyes of different colors looked nostalgic for a moment, but it was only just. Not noticing, Ellen continued.

“I am well aware of your strength from one year ago. No matter the methods, that is not a strength you can achieve within a year. Training aside, other than the strength of your attacks, nothing has changed, it is not so easy to approach me.”

Elizavetta's hands grasped the lightning whip and trembled. Intense emotion swirled in her gold and azure eyes.

“Still... Even then, you have the strength to overpower me.”

“So what?”

In contrast to Elizavetta, Ellen remained calm. Using the opportunity, she took a half step forward, clad in Arifal's wind, as she looked carefully for an opportunity.

The long whip of thunder wrapped about Elizavetta's wrist. The whip coiled about her in many bright layers,

as if to protect her. It was a snake which would attack all that approached with thunder.

“If you wish to triumph – then show it to me.”

Ellen brought up her Silver Flash once again, pulling in the cold snow with her wind. Her body shined brilliantly, reflecting the light from the ice particles. A storm raged at the tip of her blade, much larger than the one emitted before.

The whip about Elizavetta also emitted a dazzling light in response to its master's will. The pulsating thunder screamed throughout the atmosphere as countless electric sparks were discharged.

The moment Ellen raised her blade, nine whips of lightning hit the ground, so bright it would blind the eyes of ordinary people.

^{Ley Admos}
“Cleave the Wind!”

^{Gron Lazriga}
“--- Burn and Split Heaven and Earth!”

The storm and nine blades of lightning collided with a fierce roar. The bright blades born from the

[Lightning Flash of Broken Calamity]^{Saika no Sentei} ate into the vortex of wind created by the
[Brilliant Beheader of the Fallen Spirit]^{Koma no Zanki} which moved about like a large hatchet of wind.

A trail of embers followed the two as they clashed with their Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool.

Ellen ignored the red burns across her body while Elizavetta ignored the cuts which tore her skin and dress to tatters.

The earth shook, the wind and thunder carved the ground as they ate into one another, dying out at the same time. What was left was a hollow mortar with small whirls of wind and sparks of electricity rolling about the center, like embers of thunder bursting in the air.

Snow and mud soared in the sky, falling soundlessly by the two. Ellen showed a fearless smile as she held up her sword. Though her body was full of welts and burns, she did not let out a single sound of pain.

Elizavetta, too, gripped her whip, ignoring the lacerations on her body.

“It...”

Elizavetta was about to say they were even, but she swallowed her words. While Ellen had not moved a single step from the clash of their Dragon^{Veda}ic Skill, she had been forced back.

--- My...

At this time, the battlefield changed. Lim's force appeared to the Lebus soldier's left flank. It was a strong, violent attack. Cries were called as the colors of both friend and foe mingled.

“... This is my defeat.”

Seeing the sight from a distance, Elizavetta had a distorted smile. It was a false sense of strength. While she did not know she had revealed her emotions to Ellen, she knew she did not wish to reveal her weakness to herself.

“I have not taken your neck yet.”

Ellen stepped forward, her Silver Flash in hand. Elizavetta smiled brightly without preparing her whip. She spoke words which seemed as if they were prepared beforehand.

“Don't you have more pressing business, Ellen?”

Ellen's feet stopped there, her eyes opened wide as the face of a young man crossed her mind. With her longsword held at the ready, conflict and aggression were visible in her ruby eyes as she glared at Elizavetta. Seeing this reaction, the Vanadis of [Rainbow Eyes]^{Laziris} smiled gloatingly.

“Both Dukes Thenardier and Ganelon have prepared their soldiers long ago. Until now, they have been restraining each other, but, at the very least, Duke Ganelon has decided to make a move, though I do not who he might be making it against.”

Ellen stood silent, unable to move. She could understand Duke Ganelon moving against Tigre, and Thenardier's son has been killed by Tigre. They may very well have formed a temporary truce, forming a force strong enough to suppress Tigre.

“One more thing. It seems Muozinel has invaded Brune.”

Ellen stopped breathing for a moment.

--- *Muozinel did?*

Her heart beat intensely. She did not understand how Tigre would move, but she was sure he would be involved. Thinking of his position, it was far beyond the worst case of fighting both Thenardier and Ganelon with Muozinel coming into play.

“We have been fighting for over one koku. If you want my neck, we can continue by all means, but... my soldiers will last at least another one or two koku if I do not stop them.

--- *Such nonsense...!*

Ellen clenched her teeth. Though she tried to conjure the will to fight, it did not go so well. Her will that was as strong as steel was torn between her distant allies and the enemies before her.

If the difference between the two remained from a year ago, Ellen would have chosen to kill her without hesitation, but now the red haired Vanadis had skill on par with Ellen. Seeing Elizavetta smile, she shook her head and cleared her idle thoughts.

“I will end it here. However, I have no way of knowing you won't attack again.”

“Will you accept a written oath?”

“... Oath?”

“The restoration of Alexandra's fortress... though that will not be free. I require that we restart negotiations regarding the matter of the pirate subjugation, and a non-aggression pact for a year – something like that?”

Elizavetta smiled cheerfully and transformed her lightning into a short whip, showing no intention to fight. She swung it around a few times.

Ellen stared at the Vanadis, the [Rainbow ^{Laziris}Eyes] in confusion.

“You... What is your purpose?”

“Though I cannot tell you, I have achieved it.”

For a while, the two remained motionless. Elizavetta stood there calmly with her arms lowered. She had no will to fight. If she continued, she knew she would eventually lose.

On the other hand, Ellen clearly was conflicted.

If she killed Elizavetta here, the situation would only become more cumbersome. She would need to go to the capital to explain her reasons to the King, and the new wielder of the whip of lightning would need to be found. A civil war may break out, involving Legnica and LeitMeritz. There were many such examples in the history of Zhcted.

“... I wish to add one more condition.”

Before long, Ellen lowered her sword and stared at Elizavetta with her red eyes.

“What could it be?”

“An apology.”

It was a concise, frank demand which held enormous emotions. Elizavetta understood things perfectly given the sharp sound she let out.

“I am not saying you need to crawl on the ground. I just want a sincere, earnest apology.”

“... I agree.”

“If you ever do this again... I will crush you.”

Upon hearing Elizavetta's proposal, Ellen recalled Sasha's words. She did not want Ellen to remain behind for her and Legnica. It was not as if she had anticipated what would happen, but if she continued further, both Ellen and Sasha would feel heartache.

“Then I will go.”

Ellen sheathed her longsword and turned her back away. She proceeded to the battlefield, unaware that Elizavetta stared at her back in silence.

The allied forces of Legnica and LeitMeritz had fought a battle swinging between offense and defense, advance,

and retreat. When the two Vanadis returned to command , the distance gradually spread.

While the army under Ellen's command came to a halt in accordance to her demands, the Lebus Army led by Elizavetta reorganized their lines to accommodate for the scattered soldiers who had fled.

Vasaro was about ten belsta (approximately ten kilometers) away. Once they reached it, the Lebus Army finally stopped retreating.

Elizavetta ordered her soldiers to take a rest and made allowances for the injured. She also sent scouts to recover the corpses of her army and bury them after collecting relics to send to the bereaved families of the departed.

Every unit Commander reported their situation. The number who died was over six hundred. A shadow fell over her different colored eyes as she heard the number.

“You have worked hard. Thank you. I was able to achieve my purpose.”

Elizavetta had two purposes. One reason was to lure Ellen there to test out her ability. The other was as Ellen pointed out earlier. She had received a reward from Ganelon and Thenardier for moving her troops.

If it was not Ellen, she may not have moved her army.

Furthermore, she was grateful she could take advantage of Sasha.

During the pirate subjugation, some of Sasha's subordinates committed some failures. Though Elizavetta was generous enough to forgive them, she realized it was a golden opportunity. She was also able to earn something for the small villages in her territory.

She also wanted to know if she could fight Ellen as she was.

--- Considering I could not touch her a year ago, it was worth the effort.

An existence whose name she could not even begin to fathom had contacted Elizavetta and given her a power

which transcended humanity. Though she could not yet utilize even 10% of its power, she was able to overwhelm Ellen.

--- As expected of you, Eleanora...

Though Elizavetta was moving her body in a careless manner, she had been accurately seen through. Though it was mortifying, she was forced to recognize she had not yet reached Ellen's level. If she did not become stronger, she would not be able to master her power.

--- I will need to cut down on my useless movements from now on.

After giving instructions to her unit Commanders, Elizavetta looked up at the white sky. The snow which stopped earlier began to fall once again.

--- It was also snowing the first time I met Eleanora.

White petals scattered and danced in the sky as nostalgic memories floated through her mind.

Seven years ago, Elizavetta did not know she was the illegitimate child of an aristocrat. She spent every day in a poor village. Ellen was a mercenary who stayed in the village at the time.

As usual, the children in the village bullied Elizavetta for her heterochromia. It was Ellen who helped her.

It seems Ellen did not realize it. She did not notice the girl at the time was Elizavetta. When they met two years ago as Vanadis, Ellen spoke as if they had met for the first time.

It could not be helped. The time they had spoken was short, and Elizavetta had hidden her right eye at the time

.

As the governor of Lebus and a Vanadis, she no longer needed to keep it hidden. However – Elizavetta had never forgotten the brightness of Ellen's ruby eyes when she reached her hand out seven years before.

“I will not lose...”

Elizavetta, entrenched in her memories of distant times , returned to reality hearing people call her name.

“Vanadis-sama. We can delay our movements by a quarter koku if you are tired...”

“No. I am fine.”

Elizavetta shook her bright red hair in refusal. She received the report and issued more instructions. Before the sun fell, she was able to bury all those killed in battle.

“... Right.”

Suddenly, Elizavetta thought of something.

“If I remember, his name is Tigrevurmud Vorn.”

From her fight with Ellen, she did not think the two were cooperating for convenience and strategy alone.

“For the time being, I will watch how they move.”

Though Lebus, the territory Elizavetta governed, was on friendly terms with Duke Thenardier and Ganelon, it was due to the policies of the former Vanadis. Elizavetta, because it was not disadvantageous, succeeded it for that reason.

--- Dukes Thenardier and Ganelon might not necessarily win...

Considering Tigre may win, it was not a bad idea to establish a connection now.

“That is right. I will not lose.”

Elizavetta spoke with a strong tone as she stared at the sky with her eyes of different hue. For her sake, and for the sake of the people of Lebus who support her, Elizavetta began thinking of a new plan.

Amongst the allied forces of LeitMeritz and Legnica.

Elizavetta's opponent, Ellen , required many things to be done.

Though she wished to hurry to Brune even one koku earlier, the duties of a Vanadis would not permit her to, nor did Ellen intend to throw them aside. She had earned the soldier's loyalty and popularity with the people due to her actions in battle.

Thankfully, the Legnica Army undertook the majority of the procedures.

“Eleanora-sama, we cannot apologize enough. We have received a scolding from Vanadis-sama. Please, feel at ease and return to Brune in safety.”

The General of the Legnica Army also knew of the circumstances and bowed to Ellen.

“I will gratefully receive your aid. Please tell Sasha that for me.”

Those killed in action were buried, and those with large injuries were ordered to return to LeitMeritz. The next morning, Ellen and Lim left Vasaro with one thousand troops.

The snow had continued since then; the plains were covered in white. The frozen river had become a new, makeshift road. The conifer forest seemed distant, and the distant mountains were dyed with snow.

“What will you do now, Eleanora-sama?”

Lim protected herself against the cold in two layers of fur and rode the horse next to Ellen. As she gazed forward, Ellen replied with a stern look.

“We need to take a rest. Also, I want information. Let's hurry to LeitMeritz and try and grasp the movements of Muozinel.”

Though Elizavetta had not lied, she was doubtful it was the complete truth.

“If Muozinel really attacked, Tigre wouldn't stay quiet. Honestly, he can be so unreasonable...”

Lim nodded in assent.

“That man really should learn to cherish himself a little more...”

“But isn't that what you like about him?”

Ellen's ruby eyes turned to the side as she laughed and teased Lim. Lim's face was dyed red, and, despite the cold, her skin was hot.

She refused to admit it and turned away.

"That is something different... No, right, if I were to evaluate it, I would say it is more of a merit of his, though it's also a fault..."

"I get it, I get it. I'll use today to think of what to say to Tigre."

She laughed after seeing Lim pouting as she spoke once again.

"Surely Eleanora-sama has given thought about what to say already."

"I haven't given it any thought at all."

Lim looked coldly at Ellen who thrust her chest forward in a boastful manner.

"... I have enough to talk about for one hundred days, but I should think about something that would sound good."

Ellen responded with an awkward face; she had not yet been able to get rid of her mischievous expression.

--- But I wonder what I should say, what feels right?

She looked up at the snowy sky. The first words that came to her mind were [We're back], but she quickly denied it.

--- *Yeah, that's strange.*

She was going to greet Tigre, not waiting for him to come back.

--- *I've returned? I'm back? No, that's not that different. I wonder what Tigre's reaction would be...*

"I'm back" would be too casual. It is something she would say with a smile toward the people who work in her palace.

She understood her words and her attitude must maintain her dignity as a Vanadis. Even within the palace, she maintained this for the public order of LeitMeritz.

However, it is for this reason that Ellen considered the words she would speak to Tigre to be precious.

Gathering

“--- One battle.”

Ludmira pointed with her finger and spoke sternly.

“We will fight once and destroy the Muozinel Army.”

In the tent for the General in the camp of the
Unstoppable Silver Flow
[Silver Meteor Army], several maps surrounded Tigre,
Ludmira, and Rurick.

Ludmira specifically visited to give the men a sense of relief. The soldiers of LeitMeritz did not particularly feel good while the soldiers of Brune were simply confused about seeing an ally suddenly appear.

“Can you do it?”

“It is not about whether we can do it or not. We must do it.”

Glancing at the bald Knight, the Vanadis with blue hair responded arrogantly.

--- *She's similar to Ellen.*

Ludmira's attitude and expressions gave Tigre that impression. Though Ludmira and Rurick would be angry to hear it, her unshakable will and ability to make decisions reminded Tigre of Ellen and Lim.

--- I hope those two are safe. I wonder if Ellen was able to help her friend.

One after another, Tigre remembered Teita and Batran, then Augre and Massas. He did not expect help from them; rather, he hoped they managed to evacuate safely.

Again, Ellen's smile crossed his mind. He felt secure when she was nearby. Of course, she was a powerful military force, but it was more than that---

“Minus one.”

Cold air sprayed at his face along with her words. Tigre brought his mind back to the surroundings and noticed Ludmira looking at him in disappointment.

“I understand you are tired, but why are you so absent-minded in the middle of an important war council ? What were you thinking about?”

It was clear Ludmira would leave immediately if he honestly answered that he was thinking about Ellen. Tigre would earnestly beg for forgiveness and Rurick would look at him bitterly. It was fortunate, perhaps, that Ludmira simply sighed.

“Let us return to the conversation. At most, your men will last for one battle.”

Tigre scowled hearing that fact. Ludmira continued with a grim expression.

“I am not blaming you, but to fight an army of twenty thousand with a little less than two thousand is reckless. Your men need days of rest... This is especially important since they are on the battlefield.”

“But... You said we will last for a single battle. Did you have a plan in mind with that?”

Tigre asked with an expression that did not hide his confusion. Unfortunately for Tigre, he could only think of the increasing necessity to rely on the power of his bow the more and more he became cornered.

It was evident that Tigre was mentally and physically fatigued.

“Fundamentally, you do the same thing as when you fought twenty thousand.”

A bright light, as if appraising him, shined in Ludmira's blue eyes as she looked at Tigre.

“You will ignore the enemy and aim at the enemy General. Against a large force, you can only aim at the food supply and the General.”

“Why not aim for the food?”

“In that case, you need to be thorough.”

Rurick looked at Ludmira, showing he did not understand what she meant.

“First, you would need to move deeper into the enemy's troops. Next, the towns and villages along their path have been emptied and burned down. On a clear night with good conditions, even an idiot would not put them out in the open, and the enemy is no idiot.”

“Do you know anything about the enemy?”

Ludmira's expression became strained when she heard Tigre's frank question. She frowned in annoyance as she answered.

“Kreshu Shaheen Baramir. He is the brother of the King of Muozinel with the nickname of [Red Beard]^{Barbaros}.”

Tigre and Rurick looked at each other dubiously.

“... Is he famous?”

“Judging from her expression, I would say so.”

“You do not know because you are ignorant.”

She stared at them coldly in anger. Tigre scratched his head in response.

“This kind of conversation wasn't really relevant in Alsace. Sorry, but do you mind teaching us?”

“Honestly... What is Eleanora teaching you?”

Though Ludmira showed dissatisfaction, she provided an explanation.

“About ten years ago, the Sachstein Army took their fleet of one thousand ships and invaded Muozinel. At that time, Kreshu had two hundred small vessels.”

“Judging from the flow of the conversation, Kreshu won.”

“He was victorious. The Sachstein Army became so afraid of his strength, they gave him the nickname [Red Beard]. In a Muozinel dialect, he is called Barbaros.”

Tigre and Rurick looked at each other. Neither had knowledge of naval warfare, but they realized the man had an overwhelming victory against an enemy five times his strength. He was a powerful enemy who was far from normal.

However, he could not run away. The people and the soldiers would not be able to make it.

“First, it is impossible to fight within Agnes. We must retreat.”

Picking up one map, the blue-haired Vanadis showed Rurick and Tigre a place beyond Agnes within Brune, the Ormea Plains.

It was full of rolling hills with a single highway curving through the center of it. There were two hills nearby surrounded by smooth ground.

“Agnes is covered in cliffs; it will be advantageous for a large army.”

Rurick spoke with a thorny tone. After tapping his shoulder to calm him down, Tigre asked Ludmira a question in as gentle a tone as possible.

“I suppose you have a reason for choosing this location.”

Ludmira nodded as if it were natural.

“I will explain... but before that, please explain the difference between the army of twenty thousand you fought and this enemy of forty thousand.”

Ludmira glared at the two. Despite her petite body, a shiver of intimidation ran down their spines. Tigre obediently admired her as even Rurick made a wry face from her pressure.

“First, the number is obviously different, so the actual depth of the army will change.”

Responding to her request, Tigre tried to give a point by point explanation while counting them on his fingers. Probably because it was Tigre rather than Rurick that Ludmira gave it thought.

“There is also the difference between an advanced force and the main force. They most likely have the information on the battles already held.”

They likely swept through Agnes to learn its geographical features. In other words, Tigre could not replay his hands.

“Those two points are enough.”

Ludmira's blue pupils pierced the two men.

“They know the topology and have a rough estimate of our numbers, so they will not get caught with petty tricks. Even if we use a surprise attack, we will not reach their General.”

“So you believe we can manage somehow in Ormea Plains?”

“That's one reason, but we still lack in numbers. We will likely need the two thousand refugees to help.”

Tigre inhaled deeply after hearing those words. After staring at Ludmira's emotionless face, he spoke with a bitter face.

“... What will we have them do?”

“They will be a decoy.”

Ludmira showed them the location on the map, surprising Tigre and Rurick.

--- Certainly, we have a good chance of winning if we do this, but...

After examining the blue-haired Vanadis' plan on his own, Tigre looked at Ludmira with a stone-like expression. Gratitude and tension, perplexity and doubt. There were a variety of emotions piling up within him, but his face betrayed none of them.

“... It's a dangerous plan.”

“Are you afraid?”

Tigre quietly refused the Snow Princess' provocation. It was too late for fear, but he was anxious.

“Why are you leaving this to me?”

Ludmira's response was clear cut.

“If you want, you can borrow some more.”

He was satisfied with that. It seems he was borrowing quite a bit. Tigre looked away from her and glanced at his black bow leaning in the corner of the tent. He thought about the bow.

--- No, I should do this with my own power.

“You have offered conditions, and I am quite satisfied. I have expectations of you.”

The moment he had this thought, Ludmira smiled mischievously. Tigre looked at her intently and smiled with renewed vitality.

“Got it. Thank you.”

After the meeting finished, Tigre saw Ludmira off as she returned to the Olmutz Army and headed to the people, since he needed to ask for their cooperation.

“Shall we go together? I am uneasy to say this, Lord Tigrevurmud, but I would not be surprised if things got out of hand on accident.”

“No. I am enough on my own.”

He declined Rurick's invitation and walked along with his black bow. Though it was reassuring to him, Tigre was afraid the people would consider it a threat.

Furthermore, he wanted to place as little responsibility on the people.

Kreshu Shaheen Baramir, the General of the Muozinel Army received a reply from the messenger he sent to the

Zhcted Army. He did not wait silently. Even if he did not move his military force early, the supply of food, water, and fuel would only decrease by a day.

He moved without hesitation and moved his army along the Agnes path, sandwiched between the sandstone cliffs.

Of the forty thousand soldiers, fifty-five hundred had organized as a single force. Three thousand were placed in the center, one thousand on each flank, and five hundred were in the rear as a reserve force.

With this number, their movements would not be hindered by the narrow path. Kreshu designed the formation of these troops based on the map Kashim had made.

He had made seven separate armies with the brother of the King, Red Beard, proceeding a certain distance from the road. The remaining soldiers remained at the rear as reserve power.

Kreshu, in the beginning, tried to give a name to these seven units.

“For a temporary name, let's go with Red Cattle Army, Blue Cattle Army, Green Cattle Army... That should do, I suppose.”

“If it is temporary, it may be best to call them by number.”

His subordinate responded to his names. Kreshu accepted the advice, since he had only thought of the names off the top of his head.

Amongst the seven armies, Kreshu made the seventh army the main unit.

--- Now, these should be acceptable against Zhcted and Brune if they come out.

However, nothing obstructed their advance by the time they left the narrow path.

When they finally escaped from the narrow pass, they were confronted with a prairie of rolling ups and downs. Since it was winter, it was dark. However, once spring arrived, the greenery would spread about, blanketed by a carpet of grass. In the distance was a small hill.

While he caught the snow drifting down from the gray sky in his palm, Kreshu's subordinate quickly gave a report, saying the messenger sent to the Zhcted Army had returned.

“I have received word from the Vanadis Ludmira Lurie, the Commander of the Zhcted Army. I will repeat what she said.”

Seeing the messenger wipe his sweat away, Kreshu urged him to continue with a nod.

“... We have left our land and entered this country to help an important member of Brune Kingdom who asked for our aid. We differ from your Army which lawlessly violates the land of other countries. If you should doubt my word, you have only to hear of it from Tigrevurmud Vorn. Though I do not have any desire to actively fight your Army, it cannot be helped should you obstruct our duties. I pray you safely return through the path you have come by.”

After saying everything, the messenger let out a small breath and bowed.

“So she's saying to turn back if we don't wish to be hurt.”

Kreshu roughly summarized Ludmira's words before opening his large, hollowed out eyes.

--- If I doubt her words, I should ask the small noble of Brune...

Ludmira's response was advantageous for Tigre. There was no righteousness on his side. Although Ludmira responded herself, she left no room for an explanation on their end.

--- Whether it is someone from Brune or someone from Zhcted, there is no need to get heated up.

“We have forty thousand men. We have no reason to flee simply because they have a Vanadis on their side. I know of Ludmira Lurie. Very well. Let us see who will feel the pain.”

Kreshu laughed and told the messenger to take a rest.

After a while, a report came from the reconnaissance unit.

“Should we proceed to the west along the highway, we will eventually reach the hills where the Brune and

Zhcted Army are setting formation. We have confirmed both flags.”

“There is a group of approximately two thousand to the northwest. Considering their clothing, they are the people that were once caught.”

Kreshu walked with his seven aids as he listened to the report. The highway they were on extended straight and curved slightly to the northwest near the hills.

In that area, there were no geographical changes other than the two hills. There were no forests or marshes, and the river was thin.

After confirming the information, Kreshu asked for the opinion of his aids.

“They are probably just staying on the hill to keep us in check while allowing the slaves to escape.”

“If we chase the slaves, they will have no means of retreat down the hill.”

“According to the scout's report, they have about five thousand troops remaining. They do not seem to be able to prepare provisions within a day.”

Kreshu also had the same general idea as they did.

“Very well. We will surround the hill with the first four armies and chase after the slaves with the remaining three.”

There was a reason to capture the slaves. The first reason was because it would be an effective tactic against the Brune soldiers on the hill. Also, the fact that a slave managed to escape from the Muozinel Army was harmful to them.

Above all, it was natural for them to take slaves on the battlefield.

In fact, Kreshu had another purpose, but he held that from the others.

“Ludmira Lurie is known for her excellent defense. We do not need to actively attack the hill, we simply need to confine them there.”

It began to snow. Though late in the morning, it was still not past midday.

The confrontation later known as the [Battle of Ormea] began.

The Muozinel Army moved quickly with splendid cooperation. Four armies of fifty-five hundred troops, numbering more than twenty thousand in total, advanced toward the hill without taking much distance from one another. The other three armies moved away toward the highway.

“How is the situation on the hill?”

At the center of the three armies advancing along the road, Kreshu asked his aide. He had prepared twice the normal amount of reconnaissance as usual and was receiving information from all directions. He accurately gripped any changes.

“We have confirmed four flags, currently. There is currently the Red ^{Bayard}Horse Flag, the Black ^{Zirnitra}Dragon Flag, then...”

“It seems they have made barricades of spears throughout the hill. Horses can be heard in a small fort. When we approached too closely, we were attacked with stones and arrows.”

“Any injuries?”

“No. Fortunately, we were not hit.”

Kreshu gave his words of appreciation.

“One more thing. What about the small hill further back?”

“It is covered in a blanket of snow. We have seen no signs of the enemy's appearance.”

“I see. In that case, tell the men to surround the hill. Do not approach, simply surround them.”

Though obstructed by the thick gray clouds, the sun slowly approached the peak of the heavens. When midday approached, the Muozinel Army caught the two thousand refugees in their sights.

“Any movements on the hill?”

Kreshu confirmed that there were no movements and ordered his soldiers to increase their pace.

“That renowned Vanadis, she must have known it would be hopeless to attack such large numbers. No, perhaps her only obligation to Brune was to remain on the hill? Perhaps it has to do with the politics of war...”

However, Kreshu's reading was off. One soldier appeared and quickly gave a report.

“Your excellency. The enemy has appeared. They number approximately three thousand.

“They must be attacking the nearest army... But where did they come from?”

Kreshu showed no signs of being upset. When an enemy suddenly sprung out of nowhere, they must have hidden themselves somewhere.

Hearing that there were three thousand soldiers, he considered them to be in the shadow of the uninhabited hill.

--- I see. Our soldiers must have been too focused on the troops barricading themselves on the hill.

Of course, they did not neglect the uninhabited hill, but their focus was on the enemy on the hill. Knowing this would happen, the enemy must have hidden itself not on the hill but in the shadow cast by it.

--- Excellent, Ludmira Lurie. It seems the fame of your skill in defensive battles is not unfounded.

Though Kreshu considered many kinds of possibilities, he thought Ludmira would devote herself to a defensive battle on the hill given the rumors to her name.

--- No matter. We also have countermeasures for when we are attacked. Above all, we still have sixteen thousand troops remaining and you have three thousand at most.

At that time, another report was brought forth.

“The slaves which ran away have returned and are attacking here!”

Kreshu's close aids had tense faces and were speaking noisily while the brother of the King of Muozinel simply stroked his red beard. He looked at the flag above, flapping in the wind. On it was a golden helmet and sword, the symbol of Vahram, the God of War.

“Well then, will the God of War hunt the wicked Dragon and horse, or will it be overrun?”

The Muozinel Army had the first through fourth armies encircle the hill while the fifth, sixth, and seventh armies chased after the slaves down the road. The fifth army acted as vanguard, followed by the sixth army, then the seventh army, which served as the main force.

The fifth army was attacked by the
^{Unstoppable Silver Flow}
[Silver Meteor Army] and the Olmutz Army hidden beneath the hill.

They ambushed the Muozinel Army which rode horses and held spears, with a rain of arrows. Thousands of arrows mixed in with the snow and showered on them from the skies.

Though they returned fire, not a single arrow hit Ludmira. The arrows froze in mid air and shattered to pieces, melting away as the fragments fell to the ground. Seeing a phenomenon beyond common sense, the Muozinel soldiers let out a scream.

“That's... the power of your Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool?”

Tigre saw the arrows crumble like paper from the side and asked her.

“Do not say it so loudly.”

Ludmira smiled lightly and confirmed his question. Tigre nodded and nocked a few arrows in his black bow. This time, Ludmira looked into his eyes.

He pulled back the bowstring with great strength. The arrows turned to black shadows and flew, sticking into the heads or arms of the brown skinned soldiers. The men injured were neatly lined up.

“Not bad.”

Leaving short words of praise, Ludmira bravely rushed forward into the crowd with her horse, brandishing the Frozen Wave in both hands as lumps of ice formed. She mowed down Muozinel soldiers one after another, extending the path Tigre had created as she pressed forward.

The blood which flowed was frozen in an instant, melted, then disappeared in the snow as the corpses fell to the ground. Swords were cut, spears were smashed,

and bows crumbled as they were pressed between corpses, their bodies pierced and stuck to the ground.

Though the Muozinel soldiers were lightly dressed, they would not be able to stop her fierce charge even if they were in iron armor.

Spear bearers charged at Ludmira from multiple angles simultaneously. Half she drove away while the remainder she dodged by skillfully manipulating her horse and posture. The next moment, the Frozen Wave drew out from her hand and cut through the Muozinel soldiers in a flash.

A stir wrapped around the Muozinel Army. They were being pushed back in an instant by a small girl in her mid-teens.

Next to her was a boy, not so different in age from the girl, wielding a black bow, firing with an unnatural strength and accuracy.

“Are you not afraid?”

Without stopping the hand wielding her spear, Ludmira asked him in amazement.

“If you think so, then please defend me.”

Tigre responded in a somewhat rough manner. While regretting that he could only speak so simply, he pulled out another arrow from the quiver at his waist. He was already running low. As if he knew in advance, Gerard wore leather armor and approached Tigre quietly from behind with a new quiver. Tigre tapped the new quiver lightly instead of giving a greeting.

“In a situation like this, you can even aim at the enemy's unit Commander.”

Ludmira looked at Tigre with admiration. The battlefield was wrapped in a frenzy and one's field of view shook wildly. Furthermore, it was snowing, and the enemy's unit Commander was wearing a steel helmet, making him difficult to recognize. Even so, he aimed and shot his arrow. It was no easy feat.

However, Tigre gave a casual response.

“He's the only one without a black cloth on his head. If you think about it, it's pretty straightforward.”

If other people heard his reasoning, they would think him mad. In fact, Rurick had heard this theory and tilted his head, asking for an explanation again.

In the battle following Agnes, Tigre knew how the Muozinel soldiers dressed. With the breadth of vision and skill required, only Tigre could accurately attack.

Due to the unexpected surprise attack, the counter-offense of the refugees they were preying upon, Ludmira's bravery, and Tigre's accurate sniping, the fifth army fell in a very short time.

While routing the fifth army, Tigre and Ludmira joined the refugees.

“Lord Tigrevurmud, are you safe?”

Rurick yelled out from his horse. Tigre returned a smile.

“I should ask you that. Well, I'm fine.”

The Muozinel Army had retreated down the highway without any of the people they were pursuing.

The refugees were actually camouflaged soldiers from the Olmutz Army and the [Silver Meteor Army]^{Unstoppable Silver Flow}. They hid themselves as they retreated and matched their movements to when Tigre and Ludmira attacked the fifth force.

The refugees were actually on the hill surrounded by twenty thousand troops from the Muozinel Army.

Two nights ago, after the war council with Ludmira, Tigre was having difficulty in finding words to persuade the refugees.

They would remain on the hill, and should the enemy approach, they would attack with stones and arrows.

Ludmira's strategy was formed on the basis that the enemy would not try to suppress the hill.

“Even if Muozinel attacks, they can capture the refugees and use them as hostages. Thinking about it, they would want to avoid a fight, even more so against people not of Brune.”

With their fatigue, it was questionable whether or not they would understand the explanation. Even if they did

understand, there was no guarantee they would cooperate.

Tigre visited the refugee camp, still lacking confidence. Their situation was different from the soldiers'. They had tents established and bonfires burning here and there; however, they lacked physical strength, nor did they have fences or a moat.

“--- Earl.”

A young refugee girl noticed Tigre and trotted up to him. Since they learned of Tigre's title, they called Tigre by it. Tigre nodded to her while ruffling his red hair and asked her to call the representative for the refugees.

Even if they were refugees, they still numbered around two thousand. Ten representatives were elected, and Tigre was able to bring about some semblance of organization. Though it was small, it was no different than his job as a feudal lord.

Tigre borrowed a tent and assembled the representatives without giving them any details. He gave an outline of the situation. He told them the enemy was

approaching, and, though they would fight, they were lacking in numbers. He asked them to cooperate. In a more concrete manner, they were to remain on the hill.

As expected, the Refugees showed their disapproval.

“We were thrown into this war. Normally you should be protecting us. It's a bit troublesome if you suddenly ask us to fight.”

“To begin with, can we believe you? How do we know we won't just be left on the hill while you run away?”

“We have no buildings here, either. We have no property, we barely have food, and we shiver in the cold every night, yet you still wish for us to do something?”

--- If they're caught, they will be made into slaves.

Though the words were in his throat, Tigre forced them down. He came to persuade them, not threaten them.

They continued to speak of their unease and anxieties. Tigre waited for them to calm down before speaking.

"I understand your worries, however, will you still accept this plan? If I am to help you, this is a necessity... I hope you can do this."

"Then you should come to the hill as well. That's right. Why should we believe your acting?"

He had guessed what the refugees were thinking. Bitter feelings were shown in Tigre's expression.

"That cannot be done. We are challenging tens of thousands of enemies. Regrettably, I am one that can fight."

"Then think of another plan. Why don't you talk to the enemy? Rather than making us do the impossible, if you're a powerful noble, then they should listen to you."

--- I would have done that if I could.

Though he only knew so through Ludmira, the enemy's basic policy was to plunder.

Even if Ludmira sent a message to the General of the Muozinel Army, he would not necessarily respond for such a pointless thing. In the worst case, he would say he wanted to negotiate while having his men advance.

“To begin with, what about His Majesty, the King, the Knights, and the other aristocrats? Why don't you ask for their help with your power as an Earl?”

When Tigre heard this answer, he was truly disgusted.

“--- I will follow the Earl.”

A deep voice with a quiet, overwhelming strength sounded.

It came from a lone representative, a young man. Tigre knew his face by sight.

When he had freed them from Kashim, he was the man who intensely blamed Tigre. Many people remembered it and were clearly surprised. Tigre also could not conceal his surprise.

“The Earl traveled far to come here.”

“However, he may not have necessarily come to help us.”

Another person spoke up and became quiet after seeing the man glare at him. The man then continued to speak.

“He has helped us and brought us this far. That is a fact. I wouldn't mind having a bit of revenge, either. They killed our families and destroyed our homes.”

The man cut his words there and looked at the other representatives.

“We can fight. If we argue with them face to face, they will just take our necks. But if we follow the Earl, we may survive. Don't you want to stop them?”

Anger and tension was mixed with fear. The man's voice trembled. In response to his words, Tigre nodded strongly.

“To the best of my ability, I will defend you.”

The reason the Muozinel Army scouts mistook the refugees on the hill as soldiers was because Ludmira had them in camouflage for approximately half a day.

“It is difficult to carefully examine a castle. A scout is required to be able to grasp the capabilities of a fortress quickly... conversely, since they showed us their strength there in the first place, they tricked us with minimal time and effort.”

Ludmira had wonderfully used her fame for defense to trick the Muozinel Army.

Even when he received a report that the fifth army was destroyed, [Red ^{Barbaros}Beard] showed no signs of confusion. Even if he lost five thousand men, he could send the next unit of five thousand soon afterward.

Although his aides were dismayed by an approaching enemy, Kreshu retained his presence of mind.

“Send a messenger to our fourth army. Surround the hill with the first three groups and have the fourth unit move quickly to provide reinforcement.”

Kreshu thought of several situations before he gave orders. He told anything with a high probability of occurring to each unit Commander.

With the speed the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] and Olmutz Army were moving at, they would eventually clash with the seventh army. The Black Dragon and Red Horse would devour the God of War armed with weapons of gold.

Kreshu ordered the seventh army to retreat.

The ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] and the Olmutz Army did not miss the retreat of the seventh unit, and followed closely afterward. At that time, the sixth unit quickly changed direction and moved forward rapidly.

“So it really has come to that..!”

Tigre let out a deep breath as he glared at the sixth army moving in a distance. He did not have the spare time to wipe his sweat or clear away the blood of the

defeated. His dull red hair had solidified in a strange shape.

Tigre ordered the [Silver Meteor Army]^{Unstoppable Silver Flow}, consisting of only one thousand Brune soldiers, to watch for the movements of the sixth army. It was within expectations.

Instead of attacking from the front with the seventh unit, Kreshu ordered the sixth unit to take a small detour from the side. Their aim was to kill the leaders, Ludmira and Tigre.

However, they could not.

The one thousand Brune soldiers collapsed just before attacking the sixth army.

“... What's going on?”

Ludmira and Tigre looked on in blank surprise. In an instant, they were sure of it.

--- *They've reached their limit...*

The Brune soldiers had followed him from Territoire. This is why Ludmira called their [One Battle Limit].

Tigre had judged they would barely have enough physical strength to fight, but there was not a single drop of stamina remaining. The cold of the snow and the continuous battle since the morning had taken its toll.

Only a few hundred Brune soldiers continued to attack, but they were sporadic. In the end, they could not meet expectations.

The sixth army from Muozinel was attacking the ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] and Olmutz Army from the flank, as well. The violent force stopped Ludmira and Tigre's movements.

“Just one more step...!”

A spear of ice pierced through the leather armor of Muozinel soldiers as Ludmira was forced off her horse. Streaks of blood blotted her blue hair, blue clothes, and skin. Her breathing was rough; it was uncertain how many enemies she had already killed. Tigre, standing next to her, killing the enemy with his arrows, was no different.

Both his left arm gripping the bow and the right arm drawing the bowstring were numb, and he could no longer remember how many quivers he had used.

On the other hand, Kreshu was smiling brightly as his hollow eyes looked at his enemy on its last leg.

“Ha ha ha. Though short, it was a brilliant move, Ludmira Lurie. A Vanadis famous for defense boldly attacked with the aim of taking my neck, but it seems you won't be taking it any time soon.”

Just to be sure, he had moved to the back of the seventh army.

“That's right, my enemy is not just the Vanadis. It was that dreadful archer who took Kashim's head from three hundred alsin.”

The seventh and sixth armies had spread left and right to surround their enemy.

“I will drag this famous Vanadis of a neighboring nation before the King. I will not shame you as a prisoner of war but will treat you warmly as a guest.”

It could not be helped that Kreshu felt he had won. There was no means for the [Silver Meteor Army]^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} or Olmutz Army to attack – they were in such a desperate situation.

The bulk of his army surpassed ten thousand, and they were attacking an enemy with less than six thousand from two directions, and he had half encircled the enemy. Anyone could see it was the Muozinel Army's victory.

One after another, Ludmira had skewered the Muozinel soldiers who raised their sword to her. She thrust through their torso and cut through their necks. Dead bodies piled up in the snow, distorting the ground as they froze.

Tigre also emptied many quivers. He looked back to Gerard.

Viscount Augre's son had little room as well and was hard pressed against Tigre's back with two quivers of arrows, his hair a complete mess. With a look of distress, the man with brown hair spoke.

“This is all we have remaining...”

Only the two quivers remained in his hand, and the situation had become dire.

Tigre looked back at Ludmira while holding his arrows.

“Ludmira, I will hold them with my bow, you---”

“Silence.”

As she wielded her spear and forever silenced the enemy before her, the blue-haired Vanadis silenced Tigre. Fatigue was clear in her face, but her high morale shined in her eyes.

“We have plenty of enemies before us. Is this the time to complain?”

Before Tigre answered, he quickly shot an arrow through the neck of a soldier attacking Ludmira.

“It's natural to tell a tired girl to rest.”

Tigre tried to laugh but failed. His breath had fallen into disorder, and it was difficult for him to speak. He did not have much strength and his face had become stiffed.

“... Your face looks terrible.”

Tigre was amazed Ludmira still had room to say such things as a wry smile floated to his face. However, she continued her words with a serious expression.

“I am a Vanadis. My mother and my grandmother... I have pride that I have succeeded their position as a Vanadis who manipulates ice.”

A Muozinel soldier with a particularly large physique brandished a large hatchet and approached Ludmira. Ludmira buried the soldier with a single flash. Her spear released ice in response to its owner's will to fight.

“You are the one who should rest, Tigrevurmud Vorn. I will protect your back.”

Neither Ludmira's expression nor voice were intense. It was quiet like the ice she manipulated. The Muozinel soldiers were overwhelmed.

Tigre looked at her in blank surprise for a moment. The young man with red hair brought his horse next to the Vanadis with blue hair and gripped his black bow.

“You have your pride. I have my stubbornness.”

“Stubbornness?”

“From my father... and from many people, little by little. It is my stubborn nature as a man.”

His father, Urz, Massas, Batran, the people of his territory, Augre, Black Knight Roland. Other than the people he had met until this day, there were the refugees who cooperated with him, the girl who thanked him, Teita and Lim who were not here.

And Ellen.

“If I can't be proud of myself, then I couldn't possibly show my face to Teita...”

“... Idiot.”

Ludmira's voice was so small and her smile dazzling. Though her voice could not be heard, it brought with it a mysterious feeling with it deep from within her chest. A

new-found energy filled the fatigued body of the blue-haired Vanadis.

“Very well. You may fight. Fight by my side. Fight together with me.”

The Vanadis brandished the Frozen Wave while the young man nocked another arrow into his black bow.

At that time, the battle changed substantially yet again. A battle cry was heard from a distance. From the size, it seemed to be a force of several thousand.

“... Reinforcements?”

Tigre's face became tense, since he was barely able to believe his eyes.

Certainly, they were reinforcements, however, they flew under the Red Horse Flag of Brune Kingdom.

“Fight! Don't let the Muozinel Army further into our country!”

Thousands of men wielding long spears and shields in the hands suddenly appeared on horseback after giving out a battle cry.

They had appeared from the north of Ormea Plains. Having judged there was no possibility of reinforcements, Kreshu's reconnaissance had neglected it.

The net Kreshu's troops had carefully built up was dispersed, as if kicking away soft snow. They were quickly crushed.

“... What is going on?”

Tigre could not respond to Ludmira's voice in blank surprise. The men approached with spear in hand and bows to the air.

“Earl Vorn, Earl Vorn! Where are you?”

A youthful cry sounded out from the corner of the battlefield. Before Tigre and Ludmira could react, the area shined with ice.

The Muozinel soldiers rushed them but were immediately felled by spear and arrow. Knights charged forward, clearing away the troops from Muozinel. Three men appeared on horseback from the group and stood before Tigre.

The brightness of their armor was lost from the cold, blood, and dirt, testament to their desperate fight. A Knight who was Tigre's senior by about ten years bowed to Tigre.

"My name is Emir. I have heard of your name from Earl Massas Rodant and ran here with fifteen-hundred Perucche Knights. I pray you will permit me to fight under your name."

Next to the Knight known as Emir was a man holding not a spear but a sword. His face was wide and his body was large.

"Forgive me for appearing on horseback, as this is a battlefield. I am Shaie of the Lutece Knights. I have brought fifteen hundred followers with me. I have come at the request of Viscount Augre. We will follow under your command."

Finally, a middle-aged Knight with a beard gave off a good-natured smile which did not suit the battlefield. Tigre recognized his face immediately.

"I am Auguste of the Knights Calvados along with two thousand men. Allow me to help, Lord Tigrevurmud."

Tigre did not know what to say due to the series of surprises.

“You... came...”

They understood from his voice and expression. Emir and Shaie turned away, while Auguste approached to defend Tigre.

“Now then, let's get rid of these guys immediately.”

“May the fortunes of war be upon us.”

Emir and Shaie kicked the belly of their horses and ran to the battlefield. After seeing them off, Tigre regained his thoughts. He looked at Auguste as he sighed.

“... Auguste?”

“Do you remember me, Tigre-sama?”

He verified with a trembling voice. Auguste smiled; he was originally someone from Alsace when Urz, Tigre's father, ruled before becoming a Knight. He was well acquainted with Tigre.

“So you didn't forget me. It looks like you're healthy; that is most important.”

“Until now, it was impossible to come to your aid as a Knight. I am sorry. I was feeling impatient when I heard about you from Lord Roland and Olivier from the Navarre Knights through a letter.”

“... Roland?”

Tigre stared in blank surprise, hearing an unexpected name.

“You went to war for the people of Brune – At that time, I was making preparations to fight. I heard of your story from them and rushed to Lords Massas and Augre. Both the Knights of Perucche and Lutece are the same.”

Words of their lives and words of their death, they had pierced through the Knights, bringing them to action.

“Thank you... Thank you, Auguste.”

He had become so emotional that he was brought to tears, but this was a battlefield. Auguste shook his head, and Tigre blotted out the tears at the edge of his vision.

“Tigre-sama. You have become splendid. You are very much like Urz-sama.”

He could not respond. Tigre rubbed his eyes while pretending to mess with his bangs. With the Knights participating in battle, he had room to do so.

“--- Is your talk over?”

Ludmira walked to a horse, as if waiting for their conversation to end. Tigre returned a strong nod. Ludmira, also, responded with a bright smile.

“I was able to rest. You? Will you stay behind?”

“No. My bow is still not spent.”

Strength given to him by the people supporting him breathed new life into his tired body, allowing him to move forward.

“Leave your back to me. I can hold out a little more.”

“I see. Try not to be too enthusiastic, it is unseemly.”

As if it were natural, the two brought their horses side by side. The young man nocked an arrow and the girl

drew back her spear. Their clothes were smeared with sweat, blood, dirt, and snow, but their eyes shined strongly.

Straightening their breathing, Ludmira and Tigre jumped back into the fray.

“Knights? Knights is, hmm...”

Kreshu realized the victory he had grasped was disappearing and let out a sound in anger. However, in an instant, he regained his composure.

“However, it is only five thousand men.”

Kreshu was not necessarily defeated. He called for the fourth army to be sure.

While reorganizing the seventh army, Kreshu ordered them to retreat and ordered a messenger to have the sixth army focus on fighting the [Silver Meteor Army] and Olmutz Army.

Unstoppable Silver Flow

“They will lose their mobility if they rush an overwhelming force from the front.”

Kreshu's ability as a General was surprising. He skillfully avoided the Knight's charge and had the fourth unit attack them from the side.

“Our first enemy is exhausted. They have more energy with the Knights coming in as allies. Crush them all.”

Kreshu attacked Tigre from the side with the sixth army and the Knights with the fourth and seventh armies

Even if they could crush the enemy before them by charging, they could not immediately react to an attack from the side and the rear. Countless arrows and spearheads rained over the Knights.

The horses were killed, forcing the men off their steeds . They were overwhelmed by the surrounding people as they tried to stand up against the weight of their armor.

The ^{Unstoppable Silver Flow} [Silver Meteor Army] and the Olmutz Army were being blocked by the sixth unit and could not rush to cover the Knights.

How many times had they been cornered? They may not have survived the first wave if not for their surprise attack. It took a good General to bring the Knights to defeat.

However, [Red Beard]^{Barbaros} had even more outstanding judgment. His ability to command the troops despite the addition of the Knights was frightening.

However, new reports had been brought since they joined.

“... A new enemy from the northwest?”

It was not only the Knights, but the armies of Lords Massas and Augre.

They consisted of three thousand cavalry and infantry. Though their strength was not as much as the Knights, they were able to charge at the sixth army pressuring Tigre.

Their existence was decisive in the war.

Kreshu had a serious look of concern when considering his future plans for the battlefield in his mind.

--- *What to do, what to do.*

Fighting off Tigre and Ludmira and repelling the Knights and a new force of three thousand men. Even if it was impossible for others, it was possible for him.

--- *The problem is... whether or not that is the last of them.*

Initially, Kreshu assumed the enemy numbered fewer than six thousand. It was almost an exact number, displaying the height of skill of the younger brother of the King, Red Beard.

However, five thousand Knights appeared when he was on the verge of victory. While he was thinking of how to deal with that, an additional three thousand troops joined the battle. The enemy had more than doubled in size since the battle began.

--- *Why didn't the scouts see this? Did they miss it?*

Kreshu had absolute confidence in the reconnaissance unit he organized and created a plan based on the information they provided. He would lead his soldiers to victory.

--- No, there were no problems this time... If anything, it was bad luck which plagued Kreshu this time.

The enemies before him were neither Dukes Thenardier or Ganelon.

--- Was it Tigrevurmud Vorn? Brune names are too long. I'll shorten it to Tigre.

While insulting his name, Kreshu continued thinking of plans. Even if he defeated Tigre here, that would not be the end of things.

His purpose was to advance his troops through southern Brune to obtain the slaves of a busy port town surrounded by fertile lands. He also wanted to capture Nemetacum, if possible.

He would obtain great wealth by taking the ports to the south, and it would allow him to contact his country via the sea. He could also send the slaves he obtained in Brune to his homeland via ships.

--- Even if I defeat him here, I will not have enough men to fight Duke Thenardier.

Kreshu held grave doubts when reinforcements appeared twice.

Even at an age above 30, [Red Beard]^{Barbaros} had been troubled only a handful of times. He reluctantly ordered his army to retreat. Though he prepared various tricks to give his troops additional time, not a single enemy chased after them.

“How boring. Bravery and recklessness has not fallen to even one or two people, so they're not making any mistakes.”

Kreshu spoke like a child who did not get the toy he wanted. He ordered the three armies encircling the hill to retreat and listened to the damage report.

Six thousand were killed in action; Kreshu grimaced. The number was large. The advanced force of twenty thousand and the main force of thirty thousand... they were fifty thousand strong in total, yet more than 30% had been lost.

“Well, we still have thirty-four thousand remaining. We have nearly three times the number of the enemy before us.”

However, Kreshu did not take further action. He had a camp built with a moat and a fence and instructed his soldiers to get treated and rest.

He had not yet lost the will to fight; the report which would determine his future plans would soon arrive.

The next morning, a messenger from Kreshu's homeland arrived.

“Our fleet attacking from the sea was defeated by Duke Thenardier.”

"I see. In other words, even if I use these thirty-four thousand troops to break through this enemy and defeat Duke Thenardier, I would have to secure the port and endure until reinforcements arrived."

After Kreshu laughed, the messenger withdrew from the tent.

--- So long as I am not the only one to fail, I don't mind.

"Ah, that's right. I should investigate Tigrevurmud Vorn and praise him."

Kreshu instructed his soldiers to withdraw and thought of such a thing. There were two reasons for this.

The first reason was to bring forth jealousy of Tigre's influence. Kreshu wanted it to reach the level of Thenardier and Ganelon.

The other reason was for his honor.

"Even if you have lost the Black Knight Roland, there is a young hero who is in no way inferior. The dignity of Brune is still alive, is what we should say. Yes. If it's this, the blow to my honor will decrease."

The Muozinel Army retreated in an orderly manner through the roads of Agnes.

That was the conclusion of the [Battle at Ormea].

The Revelation

Tigre was glad to see Massas and Augre, especially since they had just pulled him out of a dire situation. Kreshu must have realized, though, that he still had three times the troops as Tigre.

He pulled back the injured to protect the refugees while he reorganized the line. He continued to watch the Muozinel Army retreat until they disappeared from sight .

While Tigre was still watching, a messenger from the Muozinel Army appeared. After giving some thought, Tigre, Ludmira, and Massas decided to have a meeting..

He wanted to impress the cooperation with the Zhcted Army by having Ludmira present, and Massas would act as an adviser to prevent the negotiations from being troublesome.

Rurick and Gerard were tired, and there were circumstances that required Augre to speak to the other aristocrats.

At any rate, they brought the messenger into the tent to speak.

"I came by the orders of the younger brother of Muozinel's King, Kreshu Shaheen Baramir. Earl Vorn. You have put up a good fight and appear to be popular with a variety of aristocrats and Knighthoods. We sincerely salute you. It is Brune's mistake to show such contempt for archery. You have the capability to hit your target while firing far above the battlefield buried in soldiers. Your skill is reminiscent of a legend in our country about a man who was called [Star Shooter]^{Silvrash}..."

They were words of praise given to excellent archers in Muozinel. Even so, a complicated feeling welled up within Tigre.

"--- Is that supposed to be a nickname for the Commander of the [Silver Meteor Army]^{Unstoppable Silver Flow}..."

The messenger continued speaking, giving words of flattery to the extent that it was disgusting.

While polite on the outside, Ludmira was abusing him with frosty words. They could not afford to fight the Muozinel Army any longer. Careless words could not be afforded.

“--- Tigre.”

After the messenger left, Massas tapped on Tigre's shoulder.

“You have won. You have defended your people.”

“... Did I, really?”

“I believe so. They are too far away to worry about a trap.”

The old earl laughed. Finally, Tigre could feel relief.

“Lord Massas. I am sorry, but may I rest for a while? I would like you to do something in the meantime.”

“Yes. You fought hard... You can leave this to me and get some rest.”

Massas nodded and stroked his gray beard, leaving the tent in good spirits.

Ludmira who stood next to Tigre was also preparing to tell the soldiers from Olmutz to return.

Suddenly, her eyes opened wide.

Tigre's body had leaned over and fallen onto Ludmira.

“Wai... What?”

Ludmira's could not possibly support Tigre's full weight with her small frame when she was caught off guard. Ludmira let out a small cry as she fell in place. Fortunately, it was covered in carpet, so she felt no pain.

“What are you doing?”

Ludmira gripped Tigre's shoulder and started to push him away when she noticed Tigre was breathing deeply in sleep.

Tigre had completely entered the world of dreams.

--- Should I freeze him to wake him up?

Ludmira thought such a thing when she looked at Tigre's sleeping face. The anger in her face disappeared as she looked at him seriously. His hair was a mess, there were scratches and signs of frostbite all across his face, and exhaustion was clearly present around his eyes.

“... You have fought for such a long time.”

He had led his army from Territoire to Agnes, traveling for many days and entered battle in the land of Agnes full of sandstone. Even when the battlefield moved to Ormea, he had fought against an opponent tens of thousands in size. The pressure was unusual.

“Did something happen?”

From outside the tent, a soldier asked a question after hearing the sound of Tigre collapsing. Ludmira said nothing happened, convincing the soldier.

Even with such loud sounds near his ear, Tigre showed no sign of awakening. Ludmira smiled, corrected her posture, and embraced Tigre closely.

“That stubbornness you have pride in, you certainly did show it to me.”

From the bottom of her heart, Ludmira felt it was the correct decision to cooperate with Tigre.

Since he had taken action to contact those in the surroundings, his story would certainly spread quickly. Tigre would become a powerful force in the future. Appealing to his sincerity would guarantee he would repay his debt immediately.

However, Ludmira had found a desirable partner in Tigre. She was honestly happy about that.

“--- You worked very hard. You really are great... Tigre .”

She had called him Tigre, the name she remembered Ellen used. Though she said it quietly, she was strangely embarrassed as her face flushed red and her chest burned hot.

When she thought about it, she only called Sophie and Sasha, both Vanadis, by their nicknames. Never once in her 16 years of life had she spoken in such an intimate manner with a member of the opposite gender.

When she was young, men would speak to her with reverence as a daughter of the Vanadis. This did not change when she succeeded the position. Ludmira accepted it as a matter of course.

--- But... This is not too bad.

As for Tigre, even with his mysterious black bow with the power of a Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool, you could say he did not look to be an equal to the Vanadis.

Ludmira quietly smiled and gently patted Tigre's hair.

“Sweet dreams, Tigre.”

Soon, power leaved from Ludmira's body and she fell on top of Tigre, breathing deeply as she fell asleep.

After more than a quarter koku had passed, Gerard visited the tent to speak to Tigre, but when he saw the two sleeping while embracing each other, he left the tent, deciding he had not seen anything.

Gerard also told the guard that Tigre was asleep and gave strict orders not to disturb Tigre until morning. Gerard was to be contacted for anything necessary. He then happily walked away.

「あなたはとても頑張ったわ。
素敵だったわよ。」

「ティグル」



Due to Gerard's favor, Tigre did not awaken until night fell. Though he vaguely understood something warm was touching him, it was dark and his mind was dim.

For the moment, he touched whatever the soft sensation was that was embracing him. Since he was half asleep, he did not think much. A question suddenly appeared in his mind when a sweet scent tickled his nose and a faint sigh touched his ears.

He opened his eyes. Though it took some time to get accustomed to the darkness, Tigre was becoming increasingly aware.

--- *Why is it so warm...?*

Once his eyes had become accustomed to the dark, he recognized that Ludmira had nestled up to him and his

right hand was currently massaging her right breast. Tigre realized that was the source of the soft feeling.

“... How long do you intend to continue touching me?”

An unexpected voice was heard. A scream was half-way swallowed by Tigre and only leaked out slightly. The hand touching her breast was gripped.

Slowly, Ludmira opened her eyes.

“It is unavoidable since you were half asleep... But why did you touch me?”

“Be, because it was soft...?”

Because his head was not yet fully active, his voice was hollow and his response came out as a question.

Even so, he could not think of any other reason. He thought it was like the body of a dog with long hair in which he might want to bury his face in, but he remained silent because he did not think he could easily say that this instance.

“In that case – what is with your body's reaction?”

Ludmira glanced coldly at Tigre's waist. Even if he explained the truth, she would not understand, and even if she did, she would not be convinced.



“... Wa, wait, wait a minute. It will settle down in the cold.”

“Shall I help? If you want, I can cool it in an instant, though it may freeze off and rot.”

Tigre did not answer but sat up and gave a humble apology.

“--- Very well. I am also in the wrong for sleeping next to you.”

Ludmira finally spoke after Tigre apologized for what seemed to have been one thousand times. After all that, he spoke quietly.

“Will you forgive me?”

When Tigre looked up in surprise, Ludmira nodded with a sigh.

“As I said just now, it was partly my fault. I will forgive you.”

Tigre thanked her once more. Ludmira stood up midway, paying no mind to his words, and walked

toward the exit. As she was about to exit, she turned back and looked at Tigre.

Though her face was dyed red, he could not tell for certain. It may have been an illusion in the dark tent.

“Let us have some tea. Follow me.”

Tigre stood up and followed after her with black bow in hand.

Leaving the tent, they walked beneath the cloud-covered sky. Hundreds of tents and fires could be seen past Tigre's white breath.

Tigre called a nearby lookout and asked for the situation.

“Are you well rested, Earl Vorn? Since you were last seen, there have been no particular movements amongst the soldiers. Most have been setting up tents and reorganizing.”

Tigre was reminded once again that it was a fierce battle. After asking for the location of the Olmutz soldiers, Ludmira took off. Naturally, Tigre followed her quietly.

“What will you do from now on?”

While walking through the frigid darkness, Tigre asked Ludmira.

“First, I will confirm the situation of my army. Eleanora has not yet returned, so I suppose I should ask if you still wish to cooperate more?”

Ludmira stopped her words and gazed sharply in a specific direction. Tigre followed her gaze.

--- *What is that...?*

It was a large shadow appearing before them. The moment he set eyes on it, an intense chill ran down Tigre's spine. His voice would not come out.

It was clearly darker against the light of the bonfires.

“... They say the hour before dawn is the darkest.”

Even against such a strange sight, Ludmira seemed calm, but there was no room in her expression. Looking closely, she was blotted with sweat.

The shadow looked as if it were laughing, grinning. It turned around and walked without a sound. Ludmira followed it with a grim look. Tigre was unable to keep up with the situation and followed after her.

“What... was that?”

“I heard about it from my mother. It is a ghost, a monster, or some kind of demon... It is my first time seeing it.”

A cold wind from the Frozen Wave in Ludmira's hand wrapped about her body, as if protecting its master.

“We cannot afford to leave it be... Follow me.”

She did not allow Tigre to put a word in otherwise, but she was worried in her own way. Tigre nodded at last.

--- Monster, demon... I thought of these things as fairy tales.

He strongly grasped the black bow in his hand. Tigre had something in his hand which belonged to the realm of fairy tales. He could not bring himself to deny Ludmira's words, especially as she was a Vanadis.

The shadow, not recognized by the soldiers, walked quickly ahead with light steps.

--- Is it just Ludmira and I that are aware of this...?

Thinking of Ludmira's words, it was likely it was after the Vanadis, but he needed to think of the possibility it was after him.

When the time came, Tigre was determined to help her, even if he needed to use the power of his bow.

Not defend, but fight together.

The two tirelessly chased after the shadow into a meadow some distance from the camp.

Suddenly, the shadow stopped and turned around. As it faded away, a young man emerged with a thick green cloth wrapped loosely about his short, black hair. His body was of average height and weight, and he wore a coat with fur lining the collar and sleeves.

“--- So both Lords came. No matter.”

The young man smiled brightly and spoke to himself while in a strange stance. His legs were spread and his body was leaned forward severely.

“I will have you come with me, Boy.”

The youth smiled at Tigre and kicked off the ground in his unusual posture. A moment later, his body was in the air at a height impossible for a normal human.

“Get away, Tigre!”

Ludmira shouted at him and held her spear of ice to meet the man.

“You are in the way, Master of the Frozen Wave.”

The man smiled thinly. Ludmira thrust her spear out as the man fell in accordance to gravity; however, the man stopped the blow which could easily pierce through iron with his bare hands. He used the recoil to change his trajectory and moved toward Ludmira's head.

The blue-haired Vanadis rotated her spear to block the man's kick. At the same time, Tigre shot an arrow he had knocked. The two fought as if their very breaths were united.

A surprising spectacle occurred yet again. The man caught the tip of the Frozen Wave with his bare hand and caught the arrow coming toward him with his tongue, which was longer than Tigre's arm.

“What's this. This seems pretty normal.”

The man muttered in regret as he lightly kicked Ludmira's spear and spun in the air. He landed some distance away. Tigre and Ludmira could not move for an instant. They had seen the man's tongue which was far beyond human.

“You... What are you?”

The man laughed after hearing Tigre's hoarsely spoken question.

“My friends call me Vodyanoy. You may as well.”

It was a name Tigre had heard. It was the name of a monster from fairy tales.

“It is an old story, but Vodyanoy was the name of a frog demon...”

Ludmira spoke while carefully measuring the interval between them and Vodyanoy.

“An abnormal jumping ability and a long tongue. You really are like a frog.”

The young person with the name of a demon simply shrugged his shoulder.

“Master of the Frozen Wave. I am not here for you.”

“Is that so. Unfortunately, I will still need to fight.”

“Oh? Why is that?”

Vodyanoy returned light words to Ludmira's joke. Ludmira responded with a fearless smile.

“My predecessor once said that Lavias is called the ^{Hajya no Senkaku} [Spear of Evil Death]. It is a weapon to kill [Demons], and one stands before me now.”

“Is that so. Give it a try.”

A smile of ridicule floated to Vodyanoy's face, as if to provoke Ludmira. Tigre nocked an arrow in his bow and decided to silently watch how events would play out.

--- *He said he came for me.*

His head was a mess. What exactly was the aim of this monster clad in human skin? It was likely the bow.

From the moment this black bow fell into Tigre's hands, during his encounters with Ellen, it had brought him into a tremendous world. Did the bow bring him to this world, or was it something decided at birth?

--- *I need to calm down.*

He scolded himself. He chose to use the bow; it was not because it was a family heirloom, nor did his father

force him to use it. Though he was surprised by the power in the bow, he had not thrown it aside. It was because of this bow that he had gotten as far as he had.

While Tigre was thinking, the battle between Ludmira and Vodyanoy continued.

Vodyanoy parried every blow Ludmira dealt with his bare hands. Even with the cold released at the tip, his attitude showed signs of relaxation, and his hand was unmarred.

On the other hand, Ludmira was breathing heavily.

Though the fatigue from the previous day had not yet disappeared, the mental fatigue from facing an unknown individual whose true character was yet to be revealed was even larger.

Vodyanoy collided and retreated at the same time. In that moment, Tigre pulled three arrows from his quiver and nocked his bow, pulling back forcefully. The three arrows flew at Vodyanoy. It was quick to the eyes for both Ludmira and the monster.

For a moment, Vodyanoy inhaled slightly, showing his admiration. The monster spit out a small amount of a

purple, poisonous liquid. It hit the arrows before they met Vodyanoy.

It let out an eerie sound, like water evaporating, as the arrows melted and fell to the ground. Tigre and Ludmira understood it had spit out some kind of acid.

While Tigre prepared another arrow, he ran up to Ludmira who had still not regulated her breathing.

“Are you okay?”

“You have no time to worry about me. It is after you.”

“There should be no problems if you can speak that much.”

He forced himself to smile.

The Muozinel Army had finally retreated. They had no time to be fighting some unknown creature. Neither he nor Ludmira wanted to even see such a grotesque creature.

While he had his hand on his bow, the blue-haired Vanadis whispered to Tigre.

“Can you stop his movements? A single moment is fine.”

“... I will somehow manage with this bow.”

Tigre realized Ludmira's goal at once. It was a power that originally lent its strength to Tigre's bow. She would use the power of her weapon as the Master of the Frozen Wave.

“Very well. I will leave it to you.”

After hearing her thanks, Tigre nocked an arrow to shoot Vodyanoy; however, Vodyanoy simply looked at them as if bored.

“... Is it possible you can't use your bow?”

Seeing its disbelieving look, Tigre began sweating.

“But you have used it at least once... Perhaps it is unstable? Or perhaps you can't use it unless you're on the verge of death.”

“What is your purpose?”

He carefully selected his words so as not to say anything unnecessary. It would be more advantageous if he thought Tigre could not use his bow.

“I want you and the bow.”

Vodyanoy concisely responded with a smile.

“If you come with me, I will overlook the Master of the Frozen Wave.”

“... I refuse.”

It was not Tigre who answered but Ludmira. She kicked off the ground with her spear as a mass of crystals formed. She cut the distance to Vodyanoy at a furious speed. The ground was frozen by the power of the ^{Viralt}Dragon^{alt}ic Tool and she slid on top of it.

Ludmira closed in on Vodyanoy and thrust the Frozen Wave forward while lowering her waist. She channeled power through her entire body and jumped high, but she did not intend to release the monster with a human's appearance.

“---- ^{Shero Zam Kafa}Freeze the Sky.”

A huge gust of cold thrust into the ground. Large hexagonal crystals surrounded Ludmira. With her spear pointed to the ground, a large pillar of ice thrust up through the air.

Vodyanoy's expression showed surprise for the first time. He destroyed the pillars of ice with his fist and moved his body, trying to escape.

At that time, Tigre shot an arrow. It was a normal arrow, without using the power of his bow, so Vodyanoy ignored it and casually knocked it away with his hand.

Immediately after, a sound was heard as Vodyanoy's movements stiffened for an instant. One arrow had torn through the monster's clothes, pinning them to the pillar of ice.

Tigre knew his first shot would be knocked away, so he shot two arrows in rapid succession.

Ludmira closed in on Vodyanoy again, running along the ice. Vodyanoy spit out his purple acid, but it was frozen and shattered before reaching Ludmira.

The Frozen Wave collided with the monster's fist, causing a small explosion of light. Ludmira was pushed back with a small scream.

“Master of the Frozen Wave! Right here, you will---!”

Vodyanoy could not speak another word. He swallowed his words upon sensing a force with his entire body. He stared at Tigre with wide eyes.

Tigre grasped his black bow and aimed an arrow toward Vodyanoy.

A black light gathered around the arrowhead.

While Vodyanoy was impatient, Tigre was unnaturally calm. Perhaps it was because of the trust the Vanadis placed in him or the strength of the bow, either way, Tigre had a clear mind.

For the first time, Tigre utilized the power of his bow without hesitation. He was able to endure the pressure attacking his body.

As Ludmira landed on the ground, she heard a cold wind blow past her ears as large hexagonal crystals were

sucked away. The arrowhead was covered in a black light and clumps of ice, surrounded by an unnatural silence.

At last, Vodyanoy noticed. Even Ludmira's
Veda
Dragon^{Veda}ic Skill was absorbed.

--- *Blow him away...!*

Tigre shot the arrow with an adamant will. A jet of frozen air followed behind the arrow as it flew toward Vodyanoy at a speed beyond a normal arrow.

The monster's eyes followed the incoming arrow accurately; his fist was before him as it caught the projectile.

At that moment, Vodyanoy's right arm froze and shattered in fragments. Before he realized it, the arrow of ice was thrust right before his chest.

Unable to change his posture in the air, Vodyanoy's body was frozen by the tremendous force. There was no sound as he was blown away.

The fog melted in the morning sun. The body of the demon turned to grains of ice and disappeared in the air.

--- Did we get it...!?

All at once, a large sense of exhaustion hit Tigre's body. It was impossible for him to stand up. Ludmira ran up to him, looking down with eyes full of amazement.

"... Just now, was that the power of your bow?"

Though his expression was languid, he nodded. Ludmira reached out to Tigre, her face full of concern.

"Can you stand?"

"... The other day, I nearly fainted. Compared to that...
"

It was better since he was still conscious. Even so, his body was heavy enough that he just wanted to lie in place, though it would be troublesome to do so.

"I suppose it cannot be helped."

Ludmira supported Tigre, but since she was short in stature, Tigre ended up dragging his foot. Tigre thanked her with a bitter smile.

“This is no big deal. Even so, it is difficult to believe that just happened...”

“I doubt we will ever understand what that thing was..
. no matter who we ask.”

“I could not do it... Without your power, we would not have won.”

As she looked to the side, she noticed Tigre's face before looking away with a faint blush. The two caught the sound of horses running through the forests at the same time. It was not one or two, either. It was an army of several hundred.

“... An enemy?”

“No, it is different.”

Tigre quietly dispelled Ludmira's unease. The camp should have noticed this many approaching sooner, yet they remained quiet.

Tigre's anticipation came true soon enough. A ray of light illuminated the figures to the east. They rode beneath the Black ^{Zirnitra} Dragon Flag.

Amongst the large group of cavalry, two shadows approached.

“Tigre!”

It was the nostalgic sight of silver-white hair and crimson eyes. It was Ellen followed by an expressionless girl with golden hair tied in a tail from the left side of her head. Tigre summoned all his strength to wave to Ellen and Lim.

“I just got back---”

After confirming Tigre's appearance, Ellen ran toward him on her horse with a smile. Her bright smile disappeared abruptly. She approached with a clearly displeased look.

After she approached a few steps closer, she looked down with a sharp glance. Tigre was puzzled by her attitude.

“... What is the meaning of this, you?”

Tigre was confused for a moment, then he noticed the words were not directed at him.

“... What might you mean?”

The right arm supporting Tigre seemed to freeze in an instant. Ludmira spoke with a tone so cold, even the breath before her seemed to be tinged with ice.

“I will ask carefully so you won't misunderstand. Why did you help Tigre? Perhaps you wish to take his bow?”

For every word she spoke, Tigre felt as though the air had gotten colder. Ludmira answered with a refreshed smile.

“Is it so unnatural to lend my shoulder to Tigre, who is so very important to me?”

“--- When did you start calling Tigre so intimately? What do you mean by an important person? Did your head stop working from the cold?”

Incidentally, Tigre felt the tension increase with every word. If he spoke a single word, he would attract the attention of the two Vanadis. It was frightening.

“Many things have happened since you were last here. Many things---”

Ludmira emphasized her last words more than necessary to provoke Ellen. After that, she whispered in Tigre's ears.



“Tigre, please allow me to call you that from now on. You may call me Mira.”

“Mi, Mira?...”

Inadvertently, Tigre raised his voice more than usual. Ellen did not miss it. She got off her horse violently and approached Tigre with an expression full of murderous intent.

“Tigre. Although I hoped to meet you again with a smile... It seems we have a problem.”

“Relax, Tigre. I will protect you.”

After quietly setting Tigre on the ground, Ludmira – Mira – stood before Ellen.

The two Vanadis exchanged intense glares. While Tigre looked at the two, someone lightly tapped his shoulder. When he turned around, Lim was kneeling on the ground, her index finger right before her mouth.

Tigre swallowed his words and nodded. Lim quietly carried the man with dull red hair on her back and stood up as if Tigre were simply a backpack. She lightly ran

from the spot without emitting any unnecessary sounds. With their gazes unwavering, neither Ellen nor Mira noticed.

After they had separated enough from the Vanadis, Lim opened her mouth.

“I hope you can explain the situation, Lord Tigrevurmud.”

She spoke with a strong tone with a faint glimpse of anger inside. Tigre, accustomed to her typical scolding, flinched slightly, though it was true he needed to give an explanation.

Tigre explain the entire situation, from when the Muozinel Army invaded until it withdrew. Tigre took a few breaks due to his fatigue, but Lim patiently waited for him to finish.

“So that is what happened...”

After hearing the entire story, Lim nodded in consent. As the camp came into sight, Tigre managed to stand on his feet. It would be bad if his soldiers saw him being carried by piggyback.

“There are many things I want to tell you...”

Lim turned to Tigre with those words and smiled warmly.

“But first things first. Thank you for the hard work, Lord Tigrevurmud.”

Massas greeted Tigre when he entered the General's tent with Lim.

“You went on a walk early in the morning.”

“... I'm sorry. I was too tired and fell asleep early.”

Despite scolding Tigre, Massas was worried about him. After that, the old earl exchanged greetings with Lim.

“Has the Vanadis returned? It's a good thing we could all meet again safely.”

“We will not die so easily, no matter how many people are after us.”

Massas laughed after hearing Lim's response.

“By the way, Lord Massas. What are you doing so early in the morning?”

“Yes, well...”

Massas hesitated for a moment but spoke when he felt their gazes on him.

“I received a report that someone strongly resembling His Highness the Prince is here, so I wished to speak to you first.”

“The Prince?”

Tigre frowned. He was not sure if there was a person like that, though there was a chance someone like that existed amongst the two thousand refugees.

“That's right. Blue pupils and short, golden hair.”

Hearing Massas' words, Tigre looked at Lim who stood next to him. She had blue eyes and golden hair, but they were not short., and the eye and hair color was not uncommon amongst the people of Brune or Zhcted.

“Other than that... Do you happen to have the person's name?”

“Yes. I heard it from other soldiers and was surprised.”

Massas let out a sigh. Lim then spoke from the side.

“But didn't His Highness die?”

Massas nodded without room for confusion. Tigre tilted his neck while thinking.

At that time, one soldier entered.

“Excuse me, but the girl named Regin would like to speak to the Earl.”

--- *Regin...*?

Unexpectedly, he recalled her white back. Tigre shook the memory out of his head in a panic as Lim and Massas glanced at him curiously. Tigre informed the soldier to allow her to pass.

--- *But what would she be doing so early in the morning? It can't just be small talk.*

Regin entered the tent and exchanged places with the soldier. Massas looked wide eyed and could find nothing

to say. He stroked his gray beard hard enough to pull his jaw away.

Lim looked expressionlessly and stood perplexed. Regin asked for help with a glance. Tigre also wanted to hear Massas' story, but that was a matter to worry about at another time, so he smiled at her for the time being.

“You seem to be healthy now. Did you need something?”

Regin pulled herself together and bowed with a serious look on her face.

“Though I apologize for taking your time... I wish to speak with you alone.”

“Alone...”

Hearing the sudden request, Tigre could not conceal his confusion as he looked at Regin. Her face showed determination, but she was trembling.

“I understand. You must have circumstances as well; however, if it is important, I will consult with these two people whom I trust.”

Hearing Tigre's words, Regin's gaze moved uneasily to his left and right, looking at Lim and Massas. Lim began to stand up, but Regin spoke, her face showing she had made her mind up.

“... I understand. However, Lord Tigrevurmud. What I will say in the future, can I believe that you will not say to others?”

Regin's blue pupils shined strongly. Tigre thought about her attitude and accepted. Massas and Lim looked at him.

“If possible, could we speak of this to one more person ---”

“I understand.”

Lim nodded before Tigre could say any more. Massas also agreed. At last, Regin looked at Tigre after their reassurance.

“I... I have been living under the name of Regnas until a short time ago.”

To be exact – Regnas Estel Loire Bastien do Charles. When she finished saying that, an eerie silence ruled the tent.

It was obvious for Tigre and Massas, but even Lim, from a different country, knew the name.

Regnas was her name, Estel was an honorary title which means “Star,” Loire was her surname, and Bastein was a name received from her ancestors. Do Charles meant she had a relation to King Charles, the founder of the Brune Kingdom. Even as a joke, should the name come to light, it would be considered a felony punishable by death.

--- But, now that you mention it...

When he helped her from the Muozinel soldiers, he felt as though he had known her by sight. Since he recognized her as a woman from the start, he did not connect her to Regnas.

“... For the time being, please allow us to call you Regin.”

The first to speak was Lim. Perhaps Massas was too overwhelmed to speak, as he stood there, mouthing her name. It was best to leave things be until he settled down . Right now, Regin was the primary concern.

“Do you perhaps have any proof to associate you with that name?”

Regin shook her head. Lim tilted her head in confusion .

“I apologize, but we cannot speak, then. To begin with, you are a woman...”

“Lord Tigrevurmud.”

Removing her eyes from Lim, Regin looked at Tigre.

“Six years ago, do you remember what took place in Vincennes?”

“Vincennes...”

Tigre reacted to the word immediately. Vincennes was a hunting ground in the region to the east of the King's Capital, Nice. There were meadows, rivers, and forests.

All the past Kings held a festival there and invited the domestic aristocrats and nobles of foreign countries in order to promote friendship.

Six years ago, King Faron invited the domestic aristocrats to a hunting festival. Tigre was taken along with his father, Urz, to participate.

“At that time, I was treated to a freshly cooked bird you had felled. It was the first time I had eaten anything freshly cooked.”

Regin smiled as she spoke those words. Tigre's breath stopped for a moment because that moment was known only to Tigre and Regnas.

Spears were used to hunt birds of prey in the hunting festival held by the Brune Kingdom. Bows were used by the servants only to drive the beasts toward their masters

.

At that time, Tigre acted alone after greeting the King and the Prince. His father, Urz, did not particularly want to show off his son's skill with a bow. The Royal Family simply served to greet the nobles at the festival.

Tigre walked alone in the forest and met with Regnas, who had slipped away from his supervisor.

Since they had finished their greetings just a moment ago, Regnas remembered Tigre. Seeing a red-haired boy with a bow seemed to have attracted the interest of the 10 year old Prince. Regardless, the only son of a noble with a bow was Tigre.

Can you use it? Regnas asked Tigre. He shot a bird effortlessly to show him.

The Prince looked at him with wide eyes. The boy with a bow used his hands to build a fire as if he were familiar with it and handled the bird. Regnas watched the series of motions through his fingers as he covered his eyes.

The Prince hesitated to ask, but, seeing Tigre bite into the browned meat which seemed well salted, his appetite won.

While biting into the bird, the Prince spoke with excitement. It was his first time eating such a freshly cooked meal...

“... You.”

Tigre's voice trembled. His mind recalled the memory from six years ago as he looked intently at Regin standing before him. He had not even told his father. Since Regnas had told him to keep it a secret, he was afraid after the festival had ended.

As the son of an aristocrat from the frontier, he could never come near the Prince of his country. Even so, the Prince had asked a stranger to shoot a bird, watched him carve it up on the spot, and ate it without knowing whether or not the meat was safe.

If the Prince mentioned this to someone, there was a very high chance the house of Vorn would have perished from the world if he had suffered from a stomachache.

"The next time I ate a warm meal was when you brought me soup the other day. I apologize, though, for the trouble I have caused others..."

Hearing those words, Tigre was convinced of Regin's behavior at the time. She was wary of the presence of poison. It was only when Tigre put the soup in his mouth that she had confirmed it was safe.

"Do you trust me?"

Tigre could do nothing but nod to Regin's words. Massas roughly guessed the circumstances from her words. His face was pale and he pressed strongly against his stomach. If he pressed any more, he might very well have fainted.

Tigre also wanted to collapse, but he did not. As she gazed at him, he regained his presence of mind.

“Why me?”

Should he think of her as a man or a woman? Should he contact the Royal Family? Even with those thoughts in his head, Tigre spoke in his usual tone. Regin did not particularly blame him; rather, she accepted it.

“Because I wish to borrow your strength.”

She answered clearly, her expression showing her strong will.

--- Actually, I'm in a situation where I would like more help.

At that time, Ellen and Mira entered the tent. The Vanadis frowned in doubt, feeling the atmosphere of disbelief floating through the tent.

Ellen looked rudely at Regin.

“Who is this woman?”

Massas finally fainted. Tigre and Lim looked at each other, unable to say anything.

While Lim looked after Massas, Tigre and Regin explained the circumstances to Ellen and Mira. The reaction the two Vanadis had were very similar. They turned to Regin in suspicion.

“Didn't you die in Dinant?”

“If I had died, surely there would have been a commotion... If you had taken my subordinates and me as prisoners, it would have been more well known. My neck was not taken, and I was not found, so my death was reported to His Majesty, the King.”

“Certainly... It was unnatural when you say it like that. Even if you really were killed in the war, they would want to hide it as much as possible.”

Lim agreed while looking doubtful. The three looked at Regin for an answer. As soon as she understood that

Ellen was the Vanadis that fought at Dinant, she gripped Tigre's sleeve and shook like a small, frightened animal.

"It's fine. If you can trust me, then please trust her as well. I believe in Ellen."

While Tigre spoke to appease Regin, Ellen looked silently at Mira in triumph. Lim simply watched her Lord silently as if she were deplorable.

Though Regin was worried, she decided to believe Tigre. She straightened her posture and turned back to Ellen, meeting her gaze.

"... This is a conspiracy between Dukes Thenardier and Ganelon. If it is in the battlefield, it would not be unnatural for me to die as a casualty of war."

"To begin with, you were a woman? It would be more believable if you said were a half-sister or something."

Ellen asked like a bratty child, sitting cross legged and speaking with poor manners. Massas and Tigre also wanted to know, though. Regin looked down as she hesitantly answered.

“This is due to my mother and me. In Brune, a Queen who can only give birth to daughters would be despised. Furthermore, the rights of succession are limited for a Princess... That is, it is impossible to rise to the throne.”

“So you pretended to be a Prince? Isn't that reckless?”

“Honestly. It's fine when you're flat as a brick, but if your chest grows up to be like Lim's or Sophie's, what would you have done? I hope you weren't thinking of cutting them off.”

“Please do not derail the conversation, Eleanora-sama.”

Lim blushed and reproached Ellen for her comment. Mira looked disappointed, and Tigre pretended he had not listened.

“However, Thenardier and Ganelon did not kill you; rather, you went missing. You unexpectedly managed to escape...”

Ellen hit her hand as she said those words.

“Isn't it fine remaining dead for the time being? Isn't it fine being Regin? How many people in Brune really know that the Prince is actually a woman?”

“Although it is supposed to just be His Majesty, mother, and me, it is likely Duke Thenardier and Duke Ganelon also know.”

Though Tigre was baffled while listening to the conversation between the silver-white haired Vanadis and the Princess, he finally understood.

--- I see. Even if she has died already, once the Prince's name comes out, she would be killed again.

She would be considered a girl trying to swindle others and would be punished. Even if she had some item as proof, they could simply say she picked it up from the battlefield in Dinant.

With Thenardier and Ganelon's power, that much was possible.

“At Dinant, when the Zhcted Army made its surprise attack, more than ten assassins came after me. My guards defended me, and my servant, Jeanne, barely managed to escape Dinant with me.”

Regin's shoulders trembled in anger and sorrow.

“Afterward, though I thought to return to the Royal Palace, Duke Ganelon took action in the King's Capital and Jeanne was lost. Even if I could rely on someone, it would be impossible to earn trust with this body.”

“It would be even worse. Dukes Thenardier and Ganelon would turn you into a public enemy. You would either be caught or sold as a slave if you went to anyone.”

Massas, who had finally recovered, and Tigre frowned after hearing Ellen's candid words, though they could not deny them.

“Regarding this talk, does Duke Ganelon know you are alive?”

Tigre was suddenly anxious. It was not Regin but Massas who answered.

“Incidentally, His Highness, the Prince's funeral was held in the King's Capital... Excuse my impoliteness. Duke Ganelon held a fake funeral. If that is the case...”

“Yes. He knows I am alive; however, he has not put any particular barriers in place. I have seen nothing near the capital.”

“But why did you come to such a place from Dinant?”

Tigre could not help but ask in surprise. Traveling through the eastern part of Brune would not have been easy for a traveler, let alone a Princess.

“Jeanne's hometown was in Agnes. I would not have been safe in the Royal Capital. Duke Ganelon and Thenardier's eyes were aimed to the north, west, and south of Brune. I did not think I would be safe anywhere.”

“If you knew Tigre, what about Alsace---”

“At that time, he was a prisoner of war.”

The Princess with golden hair interrupted Ellen's words as she glared accusingly at the Vanadis of

silver-white; however, Tigre was thankful for these words.

“Um... I'm sorry.”

“Ah, no.... It is not your fault, Lord Tigrevurmud.”

Seeing Tigre bow deeply, Regin looked up and spoke in a panic. Unable to interrupt the atmosphere which had formed, Ellen and Lim looked at each other sullenly while Mira concentrated on the Princess.

“Your Highness, please continue the conversation---”

Speaking with a subdued, dignified tone, Massas seemed to have accepted the situation at last. Tigre tapped her shoulder to help the stiffened Princess to relax. She had a dignity that was like Ellen's, something that other teenagers could not hope to mimic.

Regin pulled herself together and spoke once again.

“I had learned many things from Jeanne. Somehow, I was able to continue my journey without her. Although I settled in the village in Agnes where she was born and raised, the Muozinel Army attacked.”

The villagers took action then and threw their village away, scattering in every direction. Though Regin wanted to do so as well, she hesitated because she did not have a sense for the land. She was found by Muozinel scouts.

“And then... the rest is as Lord Tigrevurmud knows.”

Regin closed her mouth. Tigre looked at the Princess whose expression was difficult to read.

On the other hand, Ellen and Mira had troubled faces.

“... So, what will you do, Tigre?”

“What will I do?”

Tigre asked in return, not understanding the meaning of her question.

“Lending her your power. Frankly speaking, this person is a hindrance.”

Ellen expressed agreement with Mira's brutally honest words.

“If you claim the Prince is alive, Duke Thenardier and Ganelon would simply try to kill her, since she is a woman, and there will be many who would put her at fault.”

Tigre tilted his head after hearing their opinions.

“I understand what you mean, Ellen, Mira... But if word reached His Majesty, wouldn't it work out? Though I hear he is currently ill.”

Massas began to choke after hearing Tigre's words. Looking at the unexpected noise from the old Earl, it was clear he was sweating.

“Lord Massas?”

Tigre called out to Massas in worry. While holding his gray beard, Massas managed to squeeze out his voice, explaining the King had become extremely mentally unstable upon hearing of the Prince's death.

“That... Is it true?”

Regin turned pale and staggered from the impact. Tigre ran to support her and she managed to not fall by clinging to his arm.

“Unfortunately...”

Massas looked down and refused to say any more.

The girls from Zhcted were naturally calm. Ellen silently shook her head, Mira remained as aloof as possible, and Lim remained painfully silent.

It was a painful situation, even for Tigre.

Tigre knew she was the Prince, but it was something proven only through a memory shared by the two. It was not something they could tell to others.

Regin remained mute, as if trying to accept whatever may happen.

After worrying for some time, Tigre spoke.

“... Regin, why did you tell me? Why do you trust me?”

Her response would decide what he did.

Regin quietly looked up and looked at Tigre.

“Because you have no ulterior motives.”

“Really?”

Tigre looked doubtful. Incidentally, the three girls sitting opposite Regin nodded in satisfaction. The princess also nodded once before speaking again.

“Today, before I came to you, I asked the soldiers and the people of Brune here. Though there were not only friendly opinions... I could tell you had something you wished to defend, and you were struggling for that purpose.”

While recalling that time, Regin placed her hand on her chest and continued speaking.

“Even if you help the people of Agnes and Ormea, you have nothing to gain in return, even more so with an opponent against whom you have no possibility of determining the outcome. Still, you came here, you fought. You helped me, and... when you consented to my favor, you were not rough.”

Regin faintly blushed as she said that. Tigre understood the reason and also blushed.

“... What did you ask?”

Two people's expression changed sharply. Ellen began to frown.

Though Regin stammered, she honestly answered that she asked him to wipe her body. Tigre took a defensive stance expecting Ellen to be angry, but she showed an unexpected reaction.

“You did something pretty dangerous, you know.”

She looked at Regin with admiration.

“If Tigre attacked you, did you intend not to say anything?”

Regin nodded sharply.

“--- Though it was a cowardly thing to ask of him... At that time, I had no other means I could think of.”

--- Is that why she apologized to me at the time?

At last, Tigre was convinced. Regin, in her own way, was desperate. Though Lim and Mira were still unhappy, they did not blame him.

Tigre looked up at the dirty lamp and let out a sigh in his mind.

He could not possibly abandon her.

“Regin. Anything is good, even if it's trivial... Do you have any clues that proves you are His Majesty's, the King's child?”

If she did, Regin would be able to return to the King's Capital openly.

He returned to Alsace thanks to Ellen. Tigre hoped he could help her return to the palace.

Regin desperately searched her memory and raised a small voice when she remembered something.

“Lutetia...”

“Duke Ganelon's territory. Is there a clue there?”

Massas asked politely. Regin nodded in response.

“In Lutetia, in the center of the capital, Artishem... Beneath the soil, there is a passage where important records are stored which can only be opened by a means passed down through the Royal Family. They should be known to Prime Minister Bodwin as well. He should be able to examine them. ”

“Our talk changes quite a bit if that's the case.”

Ellen leaned forward, full of interest.

“If it is true, then we can move toward Artishem while we claim that. Even if people try to fight back, they can't do anything since the girl is trying to prove she is a member of royal lineage.”

“Certainly. If someone associated with the royal family supports this, it only lends credence to the claim.”

Lim also agreed.

“Tigre, what will you do?”

Ellen's ruby pupils shined happily.

“Either we move west and kill Duke Thenardier in Nemetacum, or we move north toward Lutetia and fight Ganelon.”

Tigre did not answer at once. He looked at everyone's faces in succession.

Ellen, Lim, Mira, Massas, Regin.

The situation had become strange. He had been helped and supported by Teita, Rurick, Augre, and Gerard.

What could he do in return? Could he return what it was they had given to him?

He understood he must end the situation as quickly as possible.

“... Let's go. To Lutetia.”

After thinking through it, Tigre gave a clear response.

Duke Thenardier's camp was in the wilderness where the trees were sparse.

After repulsing the Muozinel fleet attacking the ports to the south of Brune, he did not immediately move to rescue his allies at once; rather, he moved his army to a nameless forest.

After he had settled down, five days had passed. Though he had purchased information on the kingdom in detail, he learned of information which was not pleasant to his ears.

He had trusted Steid with the army moving against Duke Ganelon. Though they had endured well, they were in the vicinity of Nemetacum after being forced to retreat numerous times.

--- I will have to wait another day. That guy still hasn't returned.

A soldier appeared with a report. Thenardier gleefully stood up and rushed to his destination on horseback.

Though he had not heard of the location details, he understood with a glance. Five Dragons could be easily seen from a distance.

Thenardier rushed his horse forward until he reached the Dragons.

“... I apologize for having kept you waiting, your Excellency.”

Five Dragons. The old man, Dreka^{vac}, bowed his head reverently.

“Honestly. Still---”

Thenardier moved his glance to the Dragons behind the old man.

“You brought me more than I anticipated.”

Of the five, three were Earth ^{Suro}Dragons he had seen before. One was a Fire Drake with long hairs growing between its scales, covering its body. It ate ash and charcoal. It was a Dragon which could release flames to burn everything.

The last was two times larger than the other Dragons and had an overwhelming power, as if it were a small mountain that could run. It had two heads and thick scales.

“This is a Double ^{Gara Dova} Headed Dragon...”

Though a dauntless man, Thenardier could not help but be overwhelmed with delight. The Double Headed Dragon was a species considered a malformation amongst Dragons. It was large, atrocious, and strong, and would attack and kill its brethren.

The sound of chains sounded in Thenardier's ears. The Double Headed Dragon was bound with a shackle of thick, black iron which wrapped about its body.

“... Was this chain made specifically for this?”

He could think of no other reason. Though Thenardier had once seen an elephant in a foreign land, the chain was far too thick and large.

“It is as you say. In the case of this Dragon, it can kill the Vanadis...”

Though his voice was hoarse, Drekvac spoke indifferently. Thenardier, contrary to the norm, trusted him.

“You have worked hard.”

Convinced of his victory, Thenardier smiled violently.

Thenardier had postponed his movements to the north in order to add the five Dragons to his military strength. Drekvac simply had an expression like a scholar observing a laboratory animal.

“It must have been difficult to procure this Double Headed Dragon.”

A young man's voice sounded from a shadow which appeared behind the elderly man.

“How was it?”

Without looking back, Drekvac asked a short question. The shadow gradually swelled and took the shape of a person. After enough time passed, Vodyanoy, who should have been defeated by Tigre and Mira, stood there.

“You may not like to hear this, but I was had. He was with the Master of the Frozen Wave.”

He spoke in a carefree tone, as if he were playing. The old man smiled and took a gold coin from his sleeve.

“I know you were defeated. Tell me what you think of the caster for the [Bow].”

“He's weak; however, after another fight or two, he may come to master the bow. If that is the case, he will be troublesome. What should I do for now?”

While gnawing on the gold coin, Vodyanoy asked without any sign of tension.

“Remain on standby for now. Ganelon doesn't seem to be up to any good right now.”

While watching the wilderness, Dreka vac began to slowly walk away.

Epilogue

That night, several thousand people traveled across Ormea Plains to reach a local castle.

They consisted of members of the
Unstoppable Silver Flow
[Silver Meteor Army], the Olmutz Army, three different
Knighthoods, men serving under various nobles, and
refugees from Agnes.

The moon was high in the sky, and the residents were wrapped in blankets and off to the world of dreams, but the people on duty were still awake.

“I’ll leave the distribution of food to you. Do this quickly, citizens of Brune.”

“Those of you from Zhcted, if you have time to talk, why not go on patrol? Those of you who can’t move, use your head. Use it twice as much to make up for what your body can’t do.”

Rurick and Gerard sarcastically assigned miscellaneous duties, staying up throughout the night. They seemed to be working unwillingly.

However, their leaders were even more busy. Even though they had not yet recovered from the fatigue of battle, Tigre went to visit all the nobles and Knights. Unable to refuse their requests, he ended up offering his help.

Massas, Augre, and Auguste managed the place to prevent overcrowding. Eventually, he was able to meet Teita and Batran. He had finally returned safely and gave brief words to greet them.

After all the meetings at the end of the day, Tigre sat down and sighed strongly. Two beautiful women looked down at the young man with red hair who was exhausted. They were Mira and Ellen.

“Tigre. Come to my place. I will make you some tea to help you get rid of your fatigue.”

While teasing him and speaking to him with care, Mira stretched out her hand with an expression that was more cute than beautiful. On the other side, Ellen was being more direct and simply pulled Tigre to a stand.

“Unfortunately, Tigre and I need to chat for a bit... Let's go.”

However, Mira did not stand there silently. She stood before Ellen, preventing her from leaving. The two Vanadis glared at each other dangerously.

“You were a woman who was not there when it was most important. What could you possibly say to him now?”

“I should say the same to you. You managed to use his kindness to sell your help at a high price.”

“Even you are not helping him for free.”

“I've never jacked up the price just by how the person talks, unlike a certain someone.”

Every time they spoke, their eyes became sharper and their mouths distorted more. Tigre did not feel the need to arbitrate. He was mentally tired, and it was simply too bothersome.

Mira began to speak to object to Ellen's provocative attitude.

Suddenly, a soldier of Olmutz stopped by with a report saying it was necessary for Mira to be present to manage the troops and the supplies.

“I understand. Once I finish my business, I will return.”

There was no hesitation in Mira's response. She was not one to give priority to her own conveniences over public matters. Though her expression did not change, Tigre and Ellen could not miss the disappointment coloring her eyes.

“... Um, thank you for inviting me, Mira. If you are fine with it, perhaps another time.”

Tigre spoke with the intent to comfort her, telling her she did not have to worry about it. Mira smiled in return and nodded.

It was an unexpected windfall for Ellen. Once she saw Mira walk away with a slightly complex expression, she pulled herself together and pulled Tigre out by the arm.

“Where are we going?”

“Somewhere where we won't be interrupted.”

The two left the camp and walked to a prairie where the wind blew. They walked a long distance at a leisurely pace until Ellen stopped.

“... Yeah, this should be good enough.”

Ellen quietly let go of Tigre's arm. The two sat on the ground with a wind dancing vibrantly about the surroundings. Perhaps Arifal had created it.

“Half a koku. You've been busy, so at least a quarter koku. It should be nice to spend your time in a place like this without doing anything.”

Tigre understood at last. She wanted to take him away from the camp so he could rest.

Ellen smiled gently and held out her right hand. Within her grasp was a liquor bottle.

“I picked it up in your tent and hid it for our walk.”

“... I didn't notice at all.”

Tigre was not particularly slow. He was simply tired, and he always relaxed his mind when he was near Ellen.

“I wonder if anyone will notice you're gone? Well, I suppose those that look for you will just think you're loitering about.”

Ellen took a quick drink from the bottle in her hand and let out a deep breath. Her eyes narrowed in dissatisfaction as she glared at Tigre, and she spoke with a gruff voice.

“Really, I wish you'd be a bit more aware. The moment I leave, some girl acts a little kindly to you, and you start drooling... You know, she's shorter than me and her breasts are smaller, too.”

Tigre was at a loss for words. Ellen pushed the alcohol to him.

Tigre gazed at the bottle, both tension and confusion in his face. He was embarrassed that he was finding it difficult to put anything into words.

However, Ellen gazed at him happily.

After a bit of hesitation, Tigre took the container and gulped it down. It was sweet and had a crisp acidity which pierced his nose and throat.

“... It's good.”

“Isn't it?”

Ellen smiled proudly as Tigre returned the bottle. Ellen brought it to her mouth then suddenly looked at the bottle intently. Her face was serious and dyed red.

Tigre noticed her in the periphery of his view, but he could not turn to look at her in the dark. From her movements, he could tell she drank more.

She passed the bottle to Tigre again. He took it and drank more. His body was heating up from the inside. It was probably because of the alcohol.

The bottle eventually became empty as they drank in turns.

“It was good. Thanks.”

After that, Tigre turned to Ellen with his entire body, sat upright, and called her name.

“--- I'm sorry.”

He bowed deeply, his head to the ground.

“Many died.”

He was speaking of the soldiers from the
Unstoppable Silver Flow
[Silver Meteor Army].

It was composed of a mixture of Brune and Zhcted soldiers. The Zhcted soldiers were Ellen's subordinates, and, depending on Tigre's decisions, many might have survived.

For the people who live in Brune, including Tigre, the invasion by the Muozinel Army was not a problem for others, but that was different for the soldiers from Zhcted

.

The Olmutz Army followed Ludmira and fought for her, but the soldiers of LeitMeritz, including Rurick, fought for Tigre. What were their feelings, even if they were chosen by Ellen to stay behind?

“... Look up, Tigre.”

Tigre sat up after hearing Ellen's voice. The girl with silver-white hair smiled gently at him.

"Lie down."

Ellen lay on the ground as she said that. Though a bit embarrassed, Tigre lay next to her. Though he could feel the cold ground against his back, he could feel a heat in his body and head.

However, Tigre ignored that heat and looked about.

The sky was full of stars. Perhaps there were an innumerable amount of stars in his vision that would take a lifetime just to count. Though it was something he was used to seeing, it was curiously fresh.

He felt something soft touch his hand; it was Ellen's hand. Her slender, delicate hands did not seem like hands that brandished a sword about. Tigre softly grasped her hand.

"There is no need to regret the fights you have been in until today."

Ellen muttered quietly, as if her voice was swallowed by the darkness.

“Yeah. I won't then.”

“That's good. For those who have fought bravely for you, please pray to whatever God you may believe in.”

After repeating Ellen's words in his mind several times, Tigre understood.

“Thank you.”

Inadvertently, he had put strength in the hand holding hers, grasping her fingers strongly.

When he turned toward Ellen, she tilted her head. There was valiance as a warrior, a brightness, and some expectation in her red eyes.



“... To tell you the truth.”

Quietly, Ellen spoke in a tone as if she were telling a secret story.

“I thought of you many times on the way to Legnica.”

Her words broke off, but Tigre understood.

How about you? Ellen was silently asking him.

He did not recall thinking about her, but he always had a yearning to see her again.

“... I kept thinking about how reliable you would be by my side.”

She twisted his fingers, but because he expected it, he did not feel pain.

“Why were you thinking about that during your fight? Well, I do understand, but... Couldn't you have chosen some better words? Weren't you worried about me?”

The silence from before had vanished. Ellen narrowed her eyes in dissatisfaction. Her tone was sulky rather

than angry. Tigre apologized obediently, but he did not think “worry” was an appropriate term.

“I probably thought it would be fine if it were you. After taking care of your enemy, you would return.”

“What if I was captured or in trouble?”

Tigre could not immediately think of a response to answer the pouting girl next to him. Rather than thinking about it, there was probably only one answer he could give to her question.

“If I knew it, I would go to help you at once.”

It was not a false show of strength or honor, but purely sincere words. The person in question blinked involuntarily.

“... Yeah, that's right.”

After staring intently at Tigre, Ellen returned her gaze to the skies. She finally said she would do the same for Tigre.

The wind blew lightly between the two. It was not natural; her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool was being mischievous.

“That's right... You could push back an enemy numbering fifty thousand. I'm sure you could do that.”

Ellen muttered quietly, her face and tone were happy, but her voice did not reach Tigre through the wind. For a while, the two looked up at the night sky with their hands joined.

The girl with silver-white hair had a red face full of satisfaction.